

IMPAIRED DEMOCRACY  
IN GUATEMALA:  
1944-1951

BY

ALAN LEBARON

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ALAN LEBARON

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In 1944, civilians and military officers united to overthrow a dictatorial regime and install popular government. With the fall of the dictatorship, a remarkable group of men gained political control and developed programs of reform that affected many aspects of Guatemalan life. Acting largely on democratic principles, the new men in charge worked for economic modernization and social justice. Housing for the poor, hospitals, schools, meal programs for children, water for the villages, roads, and much more were integral parts of the reform movement. The need to transform the landholding patterns of traditional Guatemala was well understood, and

efforts were made in this regard. A popularly elected constituent assembly drew up a democratic charter, and the people elected a strongly reformist president. The reformers could not achieve all of their high goals in only six years, but significant progress did occur.

Unfortunately, the road to reform and modernization lay covered with profound difficulties. Specifically, three major obstacles hindered the reform movement and left an impaired democracy in Guatemala. One obstacle was a violent and rebellious opposition, composed mainly of the traditionally dominant economic groups. Disunity within the reform movement created another obstacle, while the actions of the United States government and United States-owned companies, which worked in tandem to oppose the Guatemalan government and the reformers, created the third obstacle. By the end of 1949, conflict and a lack of compromise characterized Guatemalan society and politics. The various actors on the scene had failed to find peace, compromise, or consenting co-existence. They had instead become more profoundly splintered, and prepared for continued warfare. The impaired democracy thus developed under Arévalo would continue into the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz and eventually lead to the destruction of the reform movement in 1954.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In marked contrast to the years which immediately preceded and followed, the decade in Guatemala from 1944 to 1954 was an outstanding period of reform. During these ten years, the Guatemalan government struggled to establish social, political, and economic reforms, and made some impressive achievements. In the words of Luis Cardoza y Aragón, the decade was "ten years of spring in a nation of eternal tyranny."<sup>1</sup> During the "ten years of spring," three separate governments led the Guatemalan nation: a three member "junta" from October 20, 1944 to March 15, 1945; the government of President Juan José Arevalo from March 15, 1945 to March 15, 1951; and the government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, March 15, 1951-June 27, 1954. The following pages of this dissertation will treat the first two of the three governments, with primary emphasis on the Arévalo period.

General Jorge Ubico, a dictator who came to power in 1931, still ruled Guatemala in 1944. Guatemala made steady advances toward modernization under Ubico, and a

boom in export agriculture occurred. But Ubico's policies benefited primarily the nation's wealthy few, while the dictator virtually ignored the nation's social problems. Furthermore, Ubico "ruthlessly eliminated" his opposition, "rigidly restricted" the lives of Guatemalan citizens, and "cynically perpetuated" himself in office.<sup>2</sup> The disparity between the rich and poor remained great. Nearly ninety percent of the Guatemalan workers engaged in agriculture. The national economy suffered from the adverse effects of monoculture and overdependence on foreign markets. Wealthy landowners possessed approximately seventy percent of the good farm land, much of which belonged to only a few dozen families. In spite of a largely domestic control over the production of the major export crop (coffee), U.S. companies dominated the import-export trade, internal transportation, and communications. Among Guatemala's many problems was an underdeveloped transportation system. Urban centers were far from the rural villages, often connected only by small paths or very substandard roads. International Railways of Central America (IRCA) owned the only railroad that ran from Guatemala City to the Caribbean coast. No roads capable of competition with the railroad ran the same route.

A small professional class had developed, but few middle class opportunities existed. For example, Ubico kept the government bureaucracy small, and did not allow aspiring politicians a place in government. Education received a low priority under Ubico. Teachers received a low salary; secondary school students (who previously had attended gratis) had to pay tuition, forcing many to abandon studies; the university lost its autonomy; and the freedom to express scholarly opinions was suppressed.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the rural population did not share the same culture or language as the city dwellers. Out of a population of less than three million, about sixty percent retained the Indian culture and remained unassimilated with the more modern urban elements. Indian Guatemala consisted of numerous small communities, speaking a variety of languages and dialects, and having few direct economic or social contacts outside their local area. Indian communities remained suspicious and afraid of outsiders and tended to self-protective isolation. Ubico made no effort to develop the Indian's potential.

In the spring of 1944, the dictatorship began to fall apart, as large numbers of Guatemala's most important citizens, along with university students,

military officers, and workers, clamored for Ubico's resignation. Even members of Ubico's own government turned against him. The movement became "as solid a wave of unified political feeling as Guatemala has seen before or since."<sup>4</sup> Jorge Ubico resigned on July 1, and General Federico Ponce, who had supported Ubico, became the provisional president. Although Ponce promised some limited reforms, he carried on much the same as Ubico had done. When the leaders of the reform movement began to suspect that the promised presidential elections would never come about, they opted for revolution. On October 20, 1944, civilian and military dissidents united to overthrow Ponce by armed force.

With the fall of dictatorship, a remarkable group of men gained political control and developed programs of reform that affected many aspects of Guatemalan life. Acting largely on democratic principles, the new men in charge worked for economic modernization and social justice. Housing for the poor, hospitals, schools, meal programs for children, water for the villages, roads, and much more were integral parts of the reform movement. The need to transform the landholding patterns of traditional Guatemala was well understood, and efforts were made in this regard. A popularly elected constituent assembly drew up a democratic charter, and the people elected a

charter, and the people elected a strongly reformist president. The reformers could not achieve all of their high goals in only six years, but significant progress did occur.

The revolution in Guatemala mirrored the rise of relative freedom in many parts of the world, with the defeat of nazism and fascism, and the further breakdown of the international colonial order. Many Guatemalan reformers realized their place in world events, and looked forward to a free Guatemala contributing to world peace and the growth of universal democracy. Contemporary world events, in fact, had helped inspire the Guatemalan revolution, although previous struggles for freedom, in particular the Mexican Revolution, and Guatemala's own inherent needs, provided even greater impetus.

Unfortunately, the road to reform and modernization lay covered with profound difficulties. Specifically, three major obstacles hindered the reform movement, and left an impaired democracy in Guatemala. One obstacle was a violent and rebellious opposition, composed mainly of the traditionally dominant economic groups. Disunity within the reform movement created another obstacle, while the actions of the United States government and United States-owned companies, which worked in tandem to oppose the Guatemalan government and

the reformers, created the third obstacle. By the end of 1949, although the government was more democratic than at any time before Arévalo, conflict and a lack of compromise characterized Guatemalan society and politics. The various actors on the scene had failed to find peace, compromise, or consenting co-existence. They had instead become more profoundly splintered, and prepared for continued warfare. The impaired democracy thus developed under Arévalo would continue into the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz, and eventually lead to the destruction of the reform movement in 1954.

Many authors have designated the entire 1944-1954 decade a "revolution," in order to emphasize the reforms made, and the political continuity between the initial anti-Ubico movement and the eventual programs of Arbenz. Thus, "the revolution of 1944-1954," is a phrase of wide popularity. The term "revolutionaries," in this sense, indicates the men and women who supported the reform governments of the October 1944 Junta, Juan José Arévalo, and Jacobo Arbenz. However, "revolution" is also frequently used in a more limited sense to denote specifically the movement that defeated Jorge Ubico and Federico Ponce. Thus it is not always clear whether an author is referring to the "revolution" and "revolutionaries" of October 20 or to the "revolution"

this confusion, "revolution" in the following pages will indicate only the revolution of October 20, and revolutionaries will indicate those Guatemalans who took an active part in the overthrow of the dictators. Not all of the revolutionaries in this sense would be supporters of the subsequent governments of Arbenz and Arévalo, in fact some of them would participate in the opposition.

#### Notes

1. Manuel Galich, "Diez años de primavera (1944-54) en el país de la eterna tiranía (1838-974)," Alero, 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), 70.
2. Kenneth J. Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico (Athens, 1979), xi, 282-283.
3. Carlos González Orellana, Historia de la educación en Guatemala (Guatemala, 1970), 359.
4. Kalman H. Silvert, A Study in Government: Guatemala (New Orleans, 1954), 5.

CHAPTER 2  
THE REVOLUTIONARIES OF 1944

No single person, political party, age group, economic sector or class, can claim full credit for the fall of the dictatorship. A great many Guatemalans contributed to the resignation of Ubico and the subsequent October revolution, prompting El Imparcial to claim that only a few hundred Guatemalans were not happy with the revolution.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, not all were equally active, or effective. Many had joined the fight against the dictators only during the last moments, and many dragged their heels or worked against the more profound reforms. Nor can one deny that some had been motivated primarily by greed and ambition, and maybe all of them hoped that their own interests would be advanced during the revolution. They variously wished for better jobs, more money, power, prestige, and the self-fulfillment of living out their ideals. Some of the revolutionaries would later be accused of political and economic opportunism, and no doubt opportunism did exist. According to Contreras Vélez, himself a revolutionary, there were those who took advantage of the new situation,

and "without having risked a finger for the cause," reaped financial gain.<sup>2</sup> But many others were touched by a desire to better not only themselves but all of Guatemala; they envisioned a modern, industrialized nation, under a government dedicated to justice and to the needs of the inhabitants.

The words of the revolutionaries themselves best capture the euphoria and the goals of the revolution. Juan José Arevalo said, "The revolution of October was not sectarian in its ideology. It was a national movement of emancipation."<sup>3</sup> Jorge Toriello stated that "in the revolution of 20 October, all Guatemalans participated without distinction of class or hierarchy. Their only preoccupation was to forge a new Guatemala within the concept that is today known as human rights."<sup>4</sup> For Manuel Galich, it was a "romantic" movement, and for Marco Antonio Villamar, the revolution "recuperated national dignity."<sup>5</sup> According to Contreras Vélez, "we did not fight for jobs, nor to make from the revolution a lucrative enterprise with easy profit."<sup>6</sup>

The revolutionary movement included men and women from virtually all the major sectors of the Guatemalan population: the military, rural landowners, businessmen, students, journalists and other professional groups, workers, and peasants. Each sector contained

individuals who variously accepted political views that were conservative, moderate, or strongly reformist. However, individuals who had benefitted from Ubico's rule (primarily landowners and military generals) and the hierarchy of the Church, which had close ties to the upper class, opposed the revolution.

Military participation had been crucial in the downfall of Ubico and Ponce. During Ubico's dictatorship, some 80 generals commanded the armed forces, which numbered about 15,000 men.<sup>7</sup> In return for the generals' support, Ubico handed out land, wealth, and favors. In sharp contrast, he held back the younger officers of lower rank, who did not share the fruits of dictatorship, and earned a low salary. The generals, who had received their positions from political or social connections, were usually less well trained militarily than the younger officers.<sup>8</sup> Although military men who joined the revolutionary movement were motivated also by their desire for better pay and advancement opportunities, many of them shared in the more idealistic goals of the broader revolution. Only officers, however, had leadership roles in the revolution, for the ordinary soldiers had been largely conscripted from the peasantry, and in the main they simply followed their officers.

Rural landowners made up another key sector of the Guatemalan population. Wealthy landowners were usually political conservatives, yet a significant number had grown weary of Ubico's despotism. They wanted a larger part in government, and they recognized a need for certain economic reforms.<sup>9</sup> A few embraced the revolutionary ideals of democracy and justice. The role of middle income landowners is less well documented, but these groups had also suffered a lack of freedom and opportunity under Ubico's rule, and had good reason to support an end to dictatorship.

The professional middle class had strongly united against Ubico, solidly supported the revolution, and supplied much of its leadership. Special interest needs of the professionals included freedom of speech for journalists and newscasters, more responsibility and more control over government policy for civilian politicians and bureaucrats, and freedom of education for students and teachers. Middle-class groups in general looked for an expanded job market which would accommodate their ability and ambitions.

Businessmen, or in many cases those who aspired to be businessmen, also participated in the revolution. Those who did so dreamed of an industrialized and economically diversified state that could offer the

entrepreneur new opportunities. Ubico had largely continued an old economic pattern that emphasized a limited number of agrarian exports and reliance on manufactured imports.<sup>10</sup> Thus the businessmen wanted modernization and reform leading to broader and more rapid economic growth. The business-oriented revolutionaries often demonstrated more concern with the rights of management than labor, but they understood that labor reform could promote a healthy and efficient labor force, which in turn would boost production and create a consumer sector.<sup>11</sup>

Urban workers, many of them low-skilled or unskilled, generally supported the revolution. In the words of one observer, "an important sector of workers" took part in the October fighting.<sup>12</sup> But, weak and unorganized, they were in no position to give leadership. Rural workers in some areas, in particular around major rural towns or large plantations, were aware of the efforts being made to overthrow the dictatorship, and some had been armed and organized with the help of the urban revolutionaries. Shots were fired in at least a few areas, and a potential for violence in the countryside existed, but virtually all the major fighting took place in Guatemala City.<sup>13</sup>

Youth was a characteristic widely shared by the revolutionaries, many of whom were in their teens, twenties and early thirties. In 1944, José Manuel Fortuny was twenty-eight, Alfredo Guerra Borges was nineteen, Bernardo Alvarado Monzón was eighteen, Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez was twenty-two, Mario Méndez Montenegro was about thirty, Carlos Manuel Pellecer was twenty-four, Mario Silva Jonama was twenty-one, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán was thirty-one, Francisco Arana was about thirty-eight, and Jorge Toriello was about thirty-five. Some of these men had been fighting Ubico for years. At the age of nineteen, Pellecer had been arrested and jailed by the Ubico government, and barely escaped execution. Pellecer's youth has been characterized as "rebellious: tormented adolescence that lived under a dictatorship that exhausted and asphyxiated," until the "boy-man Quijote rose to fight."<sup>14</sup>

The young revolutionaries, sometimes called the "generation of 1940" or the "generation of 1944," were aided by an older group of men, especially the "generation of 1920." The older generation had been active in the fight against Manuel Estrada Cabrera (which succeeded in 1920), and they remained proud of their revolutionary past. Francisco Villagrán (b.1897), a member of the 1945 constituent assembly and one of

President Arévalo's ministers of government, had been an important member of Club Unionista and first president of the Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios, both important anti-Estrada Cabrera student groups that also worked for political and social reform in the 1920s. Villagrán could remember with pride a dangerous mission he made to other Central American nations in search of help in the fight against Estrada Cabrera.<sup>15</sup> Clemente Marroquín Rojas (b.1897) and Eugenio Silva Peña (b.1896), both outstanding revolutionaries in 1920 and again in 1944, may have delayed Ubico's initial rise to power by four years, at great risk to their own safety.<sup>16</sup> Jorge García Granados (b.1900), the "father" of the 1945 constitution, contributed to Estrada Cabrera's demise, then was nearly executed for his fight, in 1920-1921, against President Carlos Herrera, a wealthy landowner who opposed reform. Asked why he conspired against Herrera, he had replied, "for the love of liberty."<sup>17</sup> By the time the overthrow of Ubico and Ponce occurred, a number of the "generation of 1920" had experienced years in jail and exile.

The Indian population played a more ambiguous role in the revolution. Geographically and culturally isolated, the Indians remained largely outside of direct participation in national political events. But the

Indian was feared and sought after by both revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries. Revolutionaries proposed to liberate the Indian, yet feared that the Ubico government might muster significant support from the indigenous population, which at times had benefited in small ways from Ubico's paternalistic treatment, and was said to have looked upon him with a "mystic reverence."<sup>18</sup> Ponce, moreover, had some success in getting several thousand Indians to make an armed march in his favor through the streets of Guatemala City. But the Indian population in general contributed extremely little to the efforts of either the dictatorship or the revolutionaries.<sup>19</sup>

The revolution of 1944 was not a revolution of any one class. True, the revolution was primarily carried out in Guatemala City, and led primarily by members of the middle class, but in spite of this significant urban-middle class flavor, the revolution remained a "popular," widely supported movement, with popular goals. In the slightly exaggerated words of Contreras, "bourgeois" elements "at no time propelled the revolution."<sup>20</sup> The revolutionaries came from, and represented, many backgrounds, and their goals went beyond narrow group interests. The majority of the

evolutionaries would become "Arevalistas," and champion Juan José Arévalo for President.

Notes

1. El Imparcial, Oct. 19, 1950.
2. Alvaro Contreras Vélez, En el XXX aniversario de la revolución de octubre (Guatemala, 1975), 123.
3. Prensa Libre, Feb. 19, 1970.
4. El Imparcial, Oct. 19, 1972.
5. Manuel Galich, Por qué lucha Guatemala (Buenos Aires, 1956), 74; Marco Antonio Villamar Contreras, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 17, 1987.
6. Contreras Vélez, Aniversario, 122.
7. Grieb, Guatemalan Caudillo, 46.
8. Ibid.
9. Richard Adams, Crucifixion by Power (Austin, 1970), 183; National Archives of the United States (hereinafter cited as NAUS), Category 814.00 File Date 6-545 (June 5, 1945), Dispatch number 131. Archival material will hereafter be cited by number only.
10. For an example of one industrial success story under Ubico, see: Paul J. Dosal, "The Political Economy of Guatemalan Industrialization, 1871-1948: the Career of Carlos F. Novella," Hispanic American Historical Review, 68:2 (May 1988), 321-358.
11. Leo A. Suslow, "Aspects of Social Reforms in Guatemala, 1944-1949" (M.A. thesis, Colgate University, 1949), 112.
12. González Orellana, Historia, 367.

13. Tomás Herrera, Guatemala: revolución de octubre (San José, C.R., 1986), 67, 72; Alvaro Hugo Salguero to Arévalo, August 20, 1946, Archivo General de Centroamérica, Guatemala City (hereafter cited as AGC), Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.
14. El Imparcial, August 14, 1965.
15. El Imparcial, Sept. 17, 1969.
16. La Hora, Oct. 5, 1966.
17. Prensa Libre, Oct. 29, 1974.
18. NAUS 814.00/1-1445 no. 1948.
19. Huberto Alvarado, "En torno a las clases sociales en la revolución de octubre," Alero, 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), 73.
20. Contreras Vélez, Aniversario, 123.

CHAPTER 3  
TRANSITION TO ELECTED GOVERNMENT, 1944-1945

From October 20, 1944, to March 15, 1945, the new Guatemalan leaders moved with great speed, unity of purpose, and efficiency. With the fall of Ponce, a triumvirate consisting of Major Francisco Javier Arana, Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, and Jorge Toriello Garrido, took over the reins of government. The triumvirate (the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno) had two primary duties: protect the reform movement from its enemies and serve as a transitional government until popular elections established a full-fledged democracy. In decree number one, dated October 25, the Junta Revolucionaria dissolved the national assembly that had served the dictators, and called for new elections to take place November 3, 4, and 5. The newly elected assembly (Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Guatemala) declared itself inaugurated December 3, 1944. A separate assembly was elected December 28, 29, 30, to draft a constitution. The constituent assembly, (Asamblea Constituyente de 1945) held its first official session January 10, 1945, and presented the finished constitution

on March 11, 1945. Presidential elections were held December 17, 18, 19, 1944, and Juan José Arévalo, the president-elect, took office March 15, 1945. The Junta Revolucionaria then dissolved.

The Junta, working with a cabinet and with advice from leading revolutionaries outside the government, issued 86 decrees between October 25, 1944 and March 14, 1945. Nearly all of them were then approved by the legislative assembly. Most of the new laws made minor changes in taxation or governmental structure, regulating among other things, money and banking, imports, alcohol and cigarettes. More decrees directly treated rural concerns than urban ones. Sometimes favoring wealthy landowners, sometimes not, the Junta tried to minimize the fears of the upper class while at the same time establishing the basis of social-economic reform. Decree number four, of October 26, made easier the importation of pure-blood cattle stock. Decree number five reorganized the advisory body of the Oficina Central del Café, giving greater representation to the coffee growers. Decree number seven abolished forced labor on public roads, which had been unjust to the workers, and also caused labor shortages for the landowners. Decree nine deprived large landowners of the rights of arbitrary punishment of thieves and trespassers, which they had

used for decades to coerce farm workers. Decree 74 called for the development of a program of hygiene and sanitation in the rural areas. Decree 75 established comprehensive and just regulations concerning contracts between landowners and agricultural workers, to "preserve the minimum rights that should be guaranteed the workers, in accordance with the modern tendencies to achieve better social justice." Stating that agriculture deserved "total protection, because it is the principal source of national income," the Junta by Decree 83 established an agricultural experiment station, in order to scientifically improve the nation's main industry.

Another topic to which the Junta gave its attention was education. Decree 12 declared the university autonomous. Of more general interest was Decree 20, which acknowledged that ignorance was the "primordial cause" that impeded the development of democracy, and that the revolutionaries, "with profound intensity," desired "a nation great because of its culture, its civility and its liberty." Therefore, decree 20 created a national committee for literacy (Comité Nacional de Alfabetización), with jurisdiction in all of Guatemala. Said committee could consist of any Guatemalan or foreigner who identified with the ideals of the revolution. All things considered, U.S. Ambassador Boaz

Long was favorably impressed with the work of the Junta, and reported that the triumvirate had "done much to provide a basis for the assertion that it was a most 'democratic' revolution."<sup>1</sup>

The Asamblea Legislativa, during the transition to elected government, passed 54 laws, the majority of them being approvals of various Junta decrees. In the spirit of world freedom and democracy, the assembly's first act after it recognized its own inauguration was the approval of Junta decree number 13, which recognized the government of General Charles de Gaulle as the legitimate government of France. The assembly did refuse to accept a few of the Junta's less important decrees, and made minor adjustments to some others. It also fell to the assembly to name the president of the Poder Judicial and members of the Corte Suprema de Justicia, who would begin duties in March, 1945, at the same time that a new President of Guatemala was inaugurated. But in the main the assembly allowed the Junta to direct the pace of affairs.

A grand occurrence for the Guatemalan public during the transition period was the election of a president. Political parties had formed before and after Ponce's fall from power, although these were generally small and inexperienced. Their party platforms did not

reflect plans of government in minute detail, but rather called for broad goals of material and moral amelioration, agrarian reform, and assimilation of the Indian.<sup>2</sup> Unions also began to form, and to become a political force. "We can say that the syndicate organizations emerged the day following the resignation of Ubico," wrote Alfonso Solórzano with only slight exaggeration.<sup>3</sup> While the Junta governed, the young political organizations expanded, strengthened, and prepared for the elections. Junta decree 17 prohibited the members of the Junta, their relatives, and the members of the cabinet from becoming president for six years.

Among the sixteen candidates for president, Dr. Juan José Arévalo was the most popular choice. While living in self-exile in Argentina, Arévalo received word that he had been nominated for President of Guatemala. The nomination surprised Arévalo, who had not been involved with the anti-Ubico struggle since he left Guatemala in 1935. He had in the meantime married an Argentine woman, taken Argentine citizenship, and lost much of his direct contact with Guatemala. He had not demonstrated a strong political ambition. His life work had been dedicated to the promotion and philosophy of education, as a bureaucrat and a university instructor.

There remains some confusion over who first suggested Dr. Arévalo for president, and how the consensus spread, but most accounts mention Juan José Orozco Posadas, a passionate idealist and future defender of children's rights, as one of the men who began it all. "We are not able to precisely remember the date," wrote Contreras Vélez, "when, one sunny morning, Juan José Orozco Posadas entered the offices of Nuestro Diario, and with melodramatic gestures and hands held high, addressing those who were preparing the day's newspaper, exclaimed with the enthusiasm of a boy who had just obtained the toy of his dreams: 'Señores, I have the man! The man with the clean hands! Juan José Arévalo!'"<sup>4</sup>

The great majority of Guatemalans did not know Arévalo. Only a small number of teachers, intellectuals, and friends had known him personally, although many educated people knew of his work. Indeed, throughout Latin America, where his essays on philosophy and education were highly respected, Arévalo had a reputation as a serious intellectual.<sup>5</sup> Mario Nájera, a founder of Renovación Nacional (RN), the first political party to nominate Arévalo, noted that "Arévalo was not known by the great majority of his followers. We had few facts on his life in Buenos Aires . . . but we, at least I, had

faith in his capability, in his intelligence and in his renowned reputation as an intellectual."<sup>6</sup> Along with Renovación Nacional (RN), other parties joined the support for Arévalo's candidacy, the most important being Frente Popular Libertador (FPL), a large party comprised mainly of university students.

Arévalo returned to Guatemala September 3, 1944, after Ubico had resigned but before the overthrow of Ponce. The Arévalo campaign already commanded a large popular following, and many thousands of people took to the streets and celebrated his return. "The people of Guatemala had already elected him."<sup>7</sup> Arévalo was well aware that arriving in Guatemala under the rule of Ponce put his life in danger, but it was an act that greatly aided the momentum of revolution.<sup>8</sup> For the many Arevalistas who had never seen their candidate before, it proved exciting and gratifying to find out that Arévalo was a striking individual.<sup>9</sup> He looked, sounded, and acted like a president. Over six feet tall and weighing about 200 pounds, a man with a booming voice, Arévalo was handsome, charismatic, articulate, and passionate.

The Arevalistas constructed a coalition known as Frente Unido de Partidos Políticos, and set forth a campaign platform promising widespread political, economic, and social reform. As of December 16, the

Frente included RN and FPL (which between them appealed mainly to students, teachers, and young professionals); Unión Cívica (consisting of older and business-oriented members); Frente Nacional Revolucionario (a conservative wing of the revolutionaries); Vanguardia Nacional (tacitly Marxist oriented); and various other associations, unions, and minor parties. The largest groups were urban focused, but pro-Arevalista rural organizations also existed.<sup>10</sup> The actual number of organizations fluctuated before the election, but the Frente held together, and Arévalo won the presidency with 255,260 votes, or about 86% of the total. It was, by general consensus, an honest election. Arevalistas had already won over fifty of the sixty-eight congressional seats in the elections of the previous month.

Opposition groups had made a frantic but vain attempt to defeat Arévalo. Adrián Recinos, the ambassador to the United States under Ubico, came in second behind Arévalo with some 20,749 votes. The Church had sided openly with conservative elements and did not support Arévalo. A politically conservative sector of the military officers' corps also opposed Arévalo and the reformist ideals that he represented, but in the main these officers kept a low profile and did not visibly participate in the election.<sup>11</sup>

As already noted, at the very end of December, the Guatemalans also elected a constituent assembly, which began work on January 10, 1945, and finished March 11, 1945. Great optimism and a desire to work together prevailed. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, a member of the assembly, described his coworkers as being as spirited as raw recruits who anxiously awaited the first encounter with the enemy.<sup>12</sup> Marroquín Rojas also thought the assemblymen worked quickly out of fear that delay would embolden the antirevolutionary forces.<sup>13</sup>

The constituent assembly elected a special drafting committee of fifteen men, who would draw up preliminary drafts of articles for the constitution, and then submit them to the assembly for debate, amendment, and vote. According to Kalman Silvert, the commission consisted of six "mainstream democrats," six "centrists" (three slightly to the right, three to the left), and three "social democrats."<sup>14</sup> The drafting committee and the assembly based the constitution on a number of sources, including the principles enunciated by the Junta and other Guatemalans, and sections of constitutions drawn up in other countries, for example Spain (1931), Bolivia (1938), and in particular Mexico (1917) and Cuba (1940).<sup>15</sup>

The finished constitution provided for an amount of reform unparalleled in Guatemalan history. The assembly generally agreed on the need for a strong legislature; for guarantees of social rights, and effective political democracy; and as a reaction against the dictatorial past, a weak executive.<sup>16</sup> Indians and other low-income Guatemalans were offered safeguards against past abuses. Article 82 promised education for all Guatemalans. Article 83 provided for a comprehensive program of protection and help for the indigenous population. Literate women joined all males in obtaining the vote. Articles 55 through 69 addressed labor reform and included protection from debt peonage. Also, unions were guaranteed the right to organize, female and child workers obtained special rights, and work limits were set for all laborers. Article 21 banned discrimination based on sex, race, color, class, religious beliefs or political ideas. Article 63 called for a social security system. Article 91 flatly prohibited the existence of latifundios, but neglected to define what "latifundios" meant. Article 92 allowed expropriation of private property in the national interest. Various provisions guaranteed freedom of speech, assembly, and other democratic rights.

Economic nationalism, the desire to have Guatemalans control the economy, played an important part in the constitution. Article 95 stipulated that hydrocarbons could be exploited only by the Guatemalan government, or private companies primarily owned by Guatemalans. In the lumber industry, Guatemalans would be given first preference.

Jorge García Granados, the outstanding personality and president of both the constitutional assembly and the drafting committee, became known as the "father" of the Guatemalan constitution. García, a grandson of ex-president Miguel García Granados, had been a well known political activist for many years before the revolution. From 1937 to 1938 he headed the Latin American arm of the Subsecretaría de Propaganda for the Spanish Republican government.<sup>17</sup> García later described himself as a non-Marxist socialist, with viewpoints close to those of the British Labour Party.<sup>18</sup> García's leadership at the constitutional assembly helped make some of the more advanced provisions possible. But García was not an extreme leftist or nationalist--for example he favored foreign participation in oil exploration and exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

Jorge Mario García Laguardia, in a study of Guatemalan constitutions, concluded that the 1945

constitution was superior to the two that followed, in 1954 and 1965, because all sectors of the society had participated in its creation, including communists, industrialists and merchants. It was a document of political compromise.<sup>20</sup> Although the constitution had provided the basis for substantial reform, it did not immediately break down the old order. Conservatives and moderates participated in the assembly, and as a result of their efforts the constitution, according to Marxist-oriented Guerra Borges, had been "interwoven with modern ideas and a bad aftertaste of obsolete ways."<sup>21</sup> Women revolutionaries would probably agree. Women's groups, including the women's branch of Renovación Nacional, had asked the Constituent Assembly in vain to grant suffrage rights to illiterate women as well as to illiterate men.<sup>22</sup> Provisions which protected the landowners included article 90, which guaranteed private property, while conservative elements generally could take reassurance from Article 32 which prohibited political organizations of an international or foreign character. Article 32 was meant to prohibit communism in particular, and it thus gave added protection to the existence of private property, as well as additional clout to large landowners and others who traditionally labeled their political opponents "communists."

Dr. Juan José Arévalo became president of Guatemala on March 15, 1945. That month's Revista Azul, a magazine for women, noted that the revolution had brought "a fresh and renovating gust of wind," blowing away apathy and discouragement. "We have a free country," said the magazine, "a civic consciousness each day grows deeper." Furthermore the revolution gave "new respect to woman."<sup>23</sup> Revista Azul also reported that Arévalo's inauguration caused such deep happiness that "a good percentage of the spectators cried with sincere emotion."<sup>24</sup>

The revolutionaries accomplished the transition from temporary rule to elected government quickly and efficiently. They elected a president only two and one-half months after the overthrow of Ponce; and an elected constituent assembly worked fiercely and produced a constitution in two months. The new President took office less than five months after the victory of the revolution. In order to achieve this rapid transfer of power to a popularly elected government, the revolutionaries had to cooperate with one another. They did not always agree, but they proved willing to compromise.

To be sure, not all Guatemalans supported the revolutionary process and transition to democratic

government. Even though virtually no possibility existed that Ubico or his cohorts would regain control of the government, rumors abounded of plots being made by conservatives unhappy with the populist, democratic nature of the revolution.<sup>25</sup> Those unhappy with the revolution and with the newly elected government, however, were indeed few. The great majority of Guatemalans believed that the Junta and the assemblies had constructed a solid foundation for democracy and justice. A sense of historic importance permeated the atmosphere, it seemed Guatemala was moving into the modern age.

#### Notes

1. NAUS 814.00/1-445 no. 1948.

2. NAUS 814.00/3-2945 no. 2314.

3. Alfonso Solórzano, "Factores económicos y corrientes ideológicas de octubre de 1944" in Historia de una década (Guatemala, n.d.), 50.

4. Prensa Libre, Feb. 3, 1970.

5. For a variety of positive opinions on Arévalo, taken from across Latin America, see: Alberto Ordóñez Arquéillo, ed., Arévalo visto por América (Guatemala, 1951).

6. Mario Efraín Nájera Farfán, Los estafadores de la democracia (Buenos Aires, 1956), 70-71.

7. Herrera, Guatemala, 70.

8. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, "Platicamos con el Dr. Arévalo," La Hora, Sept. 13, 1972.
9. Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 8, 1987; Oscar Barrios Castillo, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 9, 1987.
10. Juan José Arévalo, Escritos políticos y discursos (La Habana, 1953), 145-6.
11. NAUS 814.00/3-945 no. 2237.
12. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, Crónicas de la constituyente de 1945, 2nd ed. (Guatemala, 1970), 47.
13. La Hora, June 8, 1970.
14. Silvert, A Study in Government, 14.
15. Luis Mariñas Otero, Las constituciones de Guatemala (Madrid, 1958), 198-200; Silvert, A Study in Government, 14.
16. Silvert, A Study in Government, 17.
17. Ronald Hilton, ed., Who's Who in Latin America: Central America and Panama, 3rd ed. (Stanford, 1945), 25.
18. Silvert, A Study in Government, 15.
19. Ibid., 14.
20. Jorge Mario García Laguardia, "Política y constitucionalidad en Guatemala," El Imparcial, Sept. 21, 1978.
21. Alfredo Guerra Borges, Pensamiento económico social de la revolución de octubre (Guatemala, 1977), 15.
22. El Imparcial, Feb. 5, 1945; Feb. 6, 1945.
23. "Protección social: un logro fructífero de la Revolución Guatemalteca," Revista Azul, 4(March 1945), 18.

24. Gloria Mendez Mina, "Toma posesión el nuevo Presidente de Guatemala," Revista Azul, 4 (March 1945), 14.

25. See for example: La Hora, Nov. 3, 1944.

CHAPTER 4  
DR. JUAN JOSÉ ARÉVALO BERMEJO

Arévalo, as President of Guatemala, was a sincere humanist. He did not leave the presidency a rich man, nor did he spend his time in lavish splendor, as had been the previous norm in Guatemala. Even Arévalo's critics, except for the most biased, recognized his inherent honesty. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, a formidable opponent of Arévalo, observed that Arévalo had the opportunity to become wealthy but refused to do so.<sup>1</sup> It is true that as president he lawfully earned 2,400 Quetzales a month, that is, at least 24 times the salary of most Guatemalans. Such disparity, however, was not seen as unusual, and in any case it was hoped that with the ensuing reforms of the post-Ubico era income disparities in Guatemala would be reduced. In 1959, eight years after his presidency and after he had written several books, his fortune in Guatemala was valued at 300,000 Quetzales, which did not include two houses in Argentina.<sup>2</sup>

The young Doctor Arévalo had entered the Ministry of Education in 1934, in the post of Oficial Mayor de Educación Pública, but quickly clashed with the Ubico

dictatorship, and left in self-imposed exile. Arévalo's great frustration with the dictatorship is reflected in his 1935 essay, "Istmania," where he argued that if only Ubico could be deposed, and free government established, the teachers would be able to guide the nation's youth to modern civilization.<sup>3</sup> Arévalo's innovative ideas and efforts at educational reform in Guatemala subsequently earned him the praise of El Imparcial, which in 1939 recognized him as one of the nation's greatest teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Arévalo had never aspired to become a politician. In a 1968 interview, Arévalo admitted his disgust for politics. As a child, he dreamed of becoming a great poet or novelist. From the age of 14, he wrote verse, and he finished a novel when 15 years old. After entering the university he began to favor philosophy over poems and novels, and started to dream of being "a universal thinker." Also at that time, he began to disdain politics.<sup>5</sup> Such an attitude he made clear in his early writings, particularly with the following statement in 1935: "Politics is an inferior activity to which certain individuals dedicate their lives when they are incapable of being of service to a higher cause."<sup>6</sup>

Arévalo did, however, develop a political philosophy in several essays he wrote from 1935 to

1939. It was with these few pieces of work that the Guatemalans had to judge their nominee for president. Writing in the abstract style of a philosopher, he called for the politicians to pass laws ending political and economic exploitation. In Latin America, Arévalo claimed, more than 50 million people were "subjected to economic servitude, surrounded by a spiritual vacuum, and obliterated by political incapacity."<sup>7</sup> Legislators must, therefore, "redeem the masses in servitude," and allow the educators to "eliminate the spiritual remnants of colonialism."<sup>8</sup> Arévalo believed that the politicians, the economists, and the technocrats would take care of the nuts and bolts, i.e. the physical needs of the people; while the educators would establish the spiritual development of values and culture.

Throughout these pre-1940 writings can be found words of hope and optimism. Arévalo saw great potential in humanity, in all races, to achieve high culture and good government. Culture was not something only a select few could obtain, it was achievable for everyone.<sup>9</sup> But culture could not be obtained by accident. It was the duty, the "mission" of responsible intellectuals who must be the "bearers of the civilizing word."<sup>10</sup> This duty was historical, for "we are all heirs to the spiritual

legacy of the past, inevitably laboring for the future of the species."<sup>11</sup>

With proper guidance, Arévalo believed, the youth of Central America would break away from the oppression of the past. Moreover, only the young were capable of forging a democratic structure in Central America,<sup>12</sup> because the young always vigorously believe in their high potential and are never servile.<sup>13</sup> It was the duty of the educator to nurture the youth toward their revolutionary goals, to instill in them a high spiritual awareness, and put them on the road to social and cultural excellence, before they could be spiritually defeated by the oppressive systems of Central American government.<sup>14</sup> Once set in motion, youth would make Central America great.<sup>15</sup>

Arévalo retained concern and respect for Latin America's indigenous people but felt that European culture was superior. He wanted to preserve the wholesome aspects of indigenous customs and traditions, but he believed that the Indian people must be integrated into the dominant, European-oriented culture.<sup>16</sup> "Our high culture is from across the ocean, predominantly from France and Spain," Arévalo claimed.<sup>17</sup> But he was against Franco's "Hispanidad," and the colonial legacy of Spain. "We desire to transform Guatemala into a modern state,"

he said,<sup>18</sup> and modern, for Arévalo, included freedom from all forms of foreign domination. "From the hands of the Spanish to the hands of the English, from English hands to the hands of the Yankees," Central America had never known true independence.<sup>19</sup>

Arévalo also called for the union of Central America. He believed that the failure to unify Central America into a single nation, first tried after independence from Spain, was a strong impediment to cultural and economic development. Central American provinces had fought among themselves and internally, breaking into small states easily controlled by dictators and strongmen. If the isthmus would form into one large federation, it would be impossible for these dictators to stay in power. In Arévalo's idea of a united and federated Central America, there would be institutional and group autonomy within the society, e.g. for the military, the press, and the university. These various groups and institutions would work in harmony with the nation as a whole, but with the freedom to best achieve each one's highest potential. A united Central America, democratic and free, would "finish automatically" the egotistical and voracious strongmen.<sup>20</sup>

Arévalo did not alter his political philosophy when he received the nomination for president in July,

1944, but during the months of the presidential campaign, and after, he further developed and defined his pre-revolution ideas. Altogether, Arévalo's beliefs constituted a philosophy he began to call "spiritual socialism," in which "spiritual" signified the moral, ethical, cultural aspects of humanity. "I am in favor of an ethical or spiritual socialism," said Arévalo in December 1944.<sup>21</sup> "Spiritual" also included the congeniality and sympathy held by mankind for mankind, and the concept of patriotism.<sup>22</sup>

"Spiritual Socialism," as articulated by Arévalo when presidential nominee and president elect, contained as corollaries a number of direct promises to the people of Guatemala. The legislative and judicial branches of government, he promised, would be autonomous.<sup>23</sup> Arévalo would govern only as an advisor or a regulator; he would "coordinate" the various forces in society.<sup>24</sup> Spiritual Socialism would be both a moral and an economic liberation; a liberation and protection for the whole society, not just for certain individuals or the rich.<sup>25</sup> "We will liberate and protect the worker, without persecuting or hurting the employers," he said.<sup>26</sup> Arévalo praised the women for their participation in the revolution, and promised: "We will liberate woman from

social serfdom," and put her in a "new relationship of collaboration with man"<sup>27</sup>

"Spiritual Socialism," which Arévalo described piecemeal in various articles, speeches, and interviews, in his esoteric and philosophical style, was perhaps most unclear in regard to his stand on land reform. For example, note the following remarks:

The dignity of the human being is even more important than his material interests. Of course, such a point of view does not imply that material interests should be forgotten or neglected. We hope to establish a different relation between the owner or manager of the farm and the rural worker at his service. This worker has to be treated like a human being, not a slave. This is of maximum importance, and, consequently, the worker's level of income and manner of life have to be elevated.<sup>28</sup>

Arévalo recognized that to achieve the promised improvements for rural workers, changes in the land tenure system must occur. He saw the need to "liberate the land."<sup>29</sup> "Guatemala," Arévalo said, "is a country with a semifeudal economy: agriculture, livestock, latifundios, powerful foreign companies of the colonial type, masses of men rented out for work, etc."<sup>30</sup> He promised a "greater distribution of land," but this did not mean anyone would be deprived of his "legitimate rights."<sup>31</sup>

On land reform, Arévalo exercised caution, knowing the volatility of the land issue. Nor had he developed

detailed ideas for the future of Guatemala's overall economic structure. His expertise, and his interest, focused on education, and on his belief that with benign government and the help of educators, Guatemala's problems could be overcome. But Arévalo promised to work for a modern and just economy in cooperation with "capitalists, workers, towns, merchants, industrialists, and professionals."<sup>32</sup> He promised he would not implement economic policy autocratically, but would seek the help of technicians, specialists, and professionals.<sup>33</sup> Time and effort would be expended, policy would not be made offhandedly.

Concerning international economics, Arévalo promised that Spiritual Socialism would "liberate the nation from international servitude and from economic slavery." The Republic of Guatemala must not stay "one more day on its knees before the foreigners."<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Arévalo claimed that Spiritual Socialism was much different from communism. "We are not materialist socialists," he wrote. "We do not believe man is primarily stomach."<sup>35</sup> Communism, fascism, and nazism "give food with the left hand, while the right hand destroys the essential laws and morals of man."<sup>36</sup>

Arévalo above all believed in education, impartial justice, the value of each human, and

responsible government. Those who influenced Arévalo's political formation were both Latin Americans and North Americans, including Abraham Lincoln, Benito Juárez, and Hipólito Yrigoyen; while he was especially inspired by the policies of Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>37</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, Arévalo had been influenced by the ideas of José Vasconcelos, and he profoundly admired the ideals of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

In many respects, Arévalo had seemed to be the perfect candidate. His strong emphasis on the role of education attracted the teachers. His equally strong emphasis on the role of the young attracted the students. His proposal for a strong legislature and judiciary appealed to the politicians and judges. His promise to keep the university and the military largely autonomous pleased the members of these institutions. Political conservatives were appeased or at least calmed by his disdain for communism and his promises to protect the rights of the employers. He also promised to consult all groups on economic reforms, and enact such measures only after careful study. Arévalo made clear his desire to bring justice and modernization to Guatemala, not by authoritarian means but by the participation of the whole society. Moreover, the masses were to be helped, taught,

guided into the modern world, not permitted uncontrolled rebellion.

For his supporters, Juan José Arévalo was even more than the sum of the parts of his political platform. His energy, optimism, sense of duty to society, pride and dignity, all epitomized the highest ideals of the revolution. The new Guatemala also yearned for international respect, and Arévalo had, for himself at least, already achieved a measure of this. All in all, Arévalo could be seen as a worthy symbol of the educated, humanistic, cultured image that Guatemala wanted for itself.

#### Notes

1. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, "Devueltos los bienes del Dr. Juan José Arévalo," La Hora, March 16, 1959.
2. Prensa Libre, March 11, 1959.
3. "Istmania," not published until 1945, can be found in Arévalo's Escritos políticos.
4. El Imparcial, June 16, 1939.
5. "Entrevista a Juan José Arévalo," El libro y el pueblo (Mexico City), June 1968.
6. Arévalo, Escritos Políticos, 18.
7. Juan José Arévalo, "Social Structure of Education in our America" in Harold Eugene Davis, Latin American Social Thought (Washington D.C., 1961), 491.

8. Ibid., 487.
9. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 56.
10. Ibid., 11, 17.
11. Arévalo, "Social Structure," 485.
12. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 18.
13. Ibid., 26.
14. Ibid., 30, 34, 44.
15. Ibid., 47; and throughout Arévalo's writings.
16. Juan José Arévalo, Escritos pedagógicos y filosóficos (Guatemala, 1945), 38-42, cited in Marie Berthe Dion, "The Social and Political Ideas of Juan José Arévalo and their Relationship to Contemporary Trends of Latin American Thought" (M.A. thesis, The American University, 1956), 43-44. Arévalo was strongly attracted to Europe, he made his first trip there in 1927.
17. Juan José Arévalo, "Guatemala desea amistad de México," Excelsior (Mexico City), Feb. 15, 1945.
18. Juan José Arévalo, "Nosotros deseamos transformar a Guatemala en un estado moderno," El Popular (Mexico City), Nov. 12, 1944.
19. Arévalo, Escritos, 8.
20. Ibid., 59-60.
21. Arévalo, "Nosotros deseamos," El Popular (Mexico City), Nov. 12, 1944.
22. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 165-166.
23. Arévalo, "Guatemala desea amistad," Excelsior (Mexico City), Feb. 15, 1945.
24. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 168.
25. Ibid., 144.
26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Arévalo, "Nosotros deseamos," El Popular (Mexico City), Nov. 12, 1944.

29. Arévalo, Escritos Políticos, 167.

30. Ibid., 165.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 167.

33. Ibid., 167-8.

34. Ibid., 143.

35. Ibid., 130.

36. Ibid., 132.

37. Juan José Arévalo, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 14, 1986.

38. Fedro Guillén, "Charla con Juan José Arévalo," El Imparcial, May 17, 1960; "Arévalo," Novedades (Mexico City), Nov. 29, 1961.

CHAPTER 5  
POLICIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE  
AREVALISTAS:  
PART ONE

At the time of the presidential inauguration in March, 1945, Juan José Arévalo, and the men who would share with him the reins of government, had not yet decided, in exact detail, what policies they would adopt to transform their nation. They had not, for example, developed plans on how they would alter the unjust patterns in land ownership, or balance the needs and demands of workers and employers. The main focus of the revolution had been the overthrow of dictatorship, not the formation of a specific step by step blueprint for the future. They realized their inexperience in politics and government, and recognized the need to research, experiment, and learn: in this regard, they were prepared to travel to other nations in search of knowledge, and bring foreign advisors to their own country. However, many of the reformers had already developed firm convictions about the goals which Guatemala should embrace and the means in general that should be adopted to achieve these goals. They knew that,

to modernize and democratize Guatemala, they had to build a human infrastructure of educated and skilled people. The masses would have to be uplifted and brought into a national economy; they would need modern technical skills, personal management skills, political sophistication, and physical health.

The Arevalistas agreed that they must create programs and institutions capable of rationally directing the economy and society. They believed it was crucial to spend government funds on projects of industrialization, agricultural diversification, and scientific and technical modernization as well as mass education. They must halt government malfeasance and not allow the nation's wealth to end in the coffers of a wealthy few, or rich foreign-owned companies. To a large degree, the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt reflected the kind of democracy they wanted. The New Dealers in the United States, in the words of Eric Goldman, "talked of uplifting the masses, fighting the businessmen, establishing economic controls over the society, questioning the traditional in every part of living."<sup>1</sup> The reformers achieved, or had begun to achieve by the end of Arévalo's term in 1951, some of their goals. In 1951, Guatemala had become a better place to live, for most people, than in 1944.

The revolution produced a political freedom far more extensive than Guatemalans had ever known before. In 1948, Clemente Marroquín Rojas, a severe critic of the government, had to admit that "one of the few victories of the October 20 Revolution is individual liberty, very limited in some ways, but liberty after all."<sup>2</sup> José Castro, a friend of the government, observed that "everyone talks in a loud voice, gesticulates, and argues, free from fear."<sup>3</sup> Actually, political turmoil and oppositionist threats resulted in some curbs on freedom, but much less so than under previous governments. The new administration's treatment of the Church serves as an apt example. Although the Church hierarchy opposed the reform movement with hostile verbal attacks, it was not persecuted in return. The Church, between 1944-1954, experienced more growth and more freedom of religious and political expression than at any time since 1871.<sup>4</sup>

Education became a top priority of the Arévalo government, and by 1951 educational services had significantly increased. Social welfare and educational expenditures under Ubico had remained rather constant, and in the 1943-4 fiscal year reached their highest level at 2,524,100 Quetzales; under Arévalo expenditures for these services rose every year, and reached

15,506,600 Quetzales in fiscal 1948-9 (i.e. about one third of the national budget).<sup>5</sup> By 1951, public education by itself had become the top priority in the national budget.<sup>6</sup>

According to Arévalo's annual message to Congress, in March, 1951, there were 3,676 schools in Guatemala (including industrial, technical, and special education schools), 199,139 students, 10,198 teachers, and 1,109 students were studying with government scholarships. In the last year, 40,990 children had learned how to read, about 50 new schools had been built, and more than 90 more were under construction. A dance school, a commercial school, an art gallery, and two museums had been built. Also, 204 new positions for secondary school teachers had been created.<sup>7</sup> Teaching had become a higher paying profession soon after the revolution: pay went from fourteen Quetzales a month to seventy-five a month in villages, from twenty-two to seventy-five in department capitals and from thirty to seventy-five in Guatemala City.<sup>8</sup>

Close to Arévalo's heart was the education of the masses. An executive decree of May 23, 1946, created the Misiones Ambulantes de Cultura Inicial, to be directly dependent on President Arévalo. The Misiones Ambulantes were "moving schools," consisting of a small number of

government representatives who would move through the countryside giving help and advice to campesinos. Personnel would be limited to a licensed teacher, a military officer, a last year medical student, an agricultural expert, and a translator. These "moving schools", according to plan, would teach patriotism, the rights and duties of Guatemalan citizens, the origin and goals of the revolution, and health and childcare. They would also promote and oversee the construction of new houses, improve health care, help solve labor problems and improve the rural economy in general. Sports programs would be established, and when possible, cinema, music, and theater. All school-aged campesino children would be taught to read and write and given a basic education, as would adults under age 30. The use of footwear, handcarts, and packmules would be encouraged. The isiones were also instructed to compile "complete and systematic information" on the local inhabitants and the region, "from economic, cultural, military and political points of view." The above cited guidelines, however, were only part of the many detailed instructions that were to direct the program.<sup>9</sup> Five of these "moving schools" were actually established, and during Arévalo's period they moved over a wide area of the Guatemalan countryside. The "schools" worked energetically to

comply with their guidelines. Among other things they founded libraries, handed out educational material, formed musical and theatrical groups, showed educational films, and created schools that would continue the educational work of the mission after it had moved on to another place. In fiscal year 1948-1949, they treated 3,145 medical patients, and in 1950-1951, they treated 6,789 patients. They helped with agriculture and local construction.<sup>10</sup> They also became effective instruments of government propaganda.

Arévalo himself devised plans for a unique system of schools called Escuelas Federación, that he hoped would offer solutions to a number of existing problems. Arévalo noted that under the traditional school system, a school bell rang to cancel the class session, often at a time when students and teacher were engaging in "premium moments of fruitful discourse." Such moments came only after careful cultivation by the teacher. The students would then leave, to change class, recess, or go home, and the teacher had the task of recreating a feeling of harmony at the next class. The school bell, used in this way, would therefore have to be eliminated. But the school bell, according to Arévalo, was only symbolic of greater difficulties. The entire educational system, which dictated subjects to be covered, time allotted

for each, and even the physical environment, hampered the best efforts of the educator. Arévalo believed that the teacher was in fact an educational artist, who should have the freedom to create each class in his or her own style.

In order to give the teacher-artist complete autonomy, even the school building would be constructed in a new style. The schools should be outside of the city center, and have ample space indoors and out. The actual style of the buildings would vary according to local needs, but the largest would consist of a large, circular center core, with eight classrooms that projected out from it like spokes on a wheel. Other buildings erected on the school site would include special technical training centers. Each teacher was to be autonomous in his "spoke," free to arrange class subjects and time, thus allowing the teacher and students to achieve their highest potential.<sup>11</sup>

The large center building would serve a number of important roles. It could be used by sport groups, political parties, agricultural societies, religious groups, and others. It could be used as a theater, conference hall, etc. Patriotic themes created by Guatemalan artists should decorate the hall, and the national flag should top the building. In short, the

center building would unite the school with local and national organizations of government and society, thereby making the school, in the highly abstract and theoretical mind of Arévalo, a centerpoint in national culture.<sup>12</sup> Education in these schools was generally considered to be of high quality, during and after the Arévalo period.<sup>13</sup> Less than a dozen of the larger type "federation schools" were constructed before the end of Arévalo's term;<sup>14</sup> new construction stopped under Arbenz because of the high costs in relation to traditional schools. However, the creation of the federation schools demonstrates Arévalo's and the Arevalistas' commitment to education, and the place of central importance that they gave it.

The reformers also believed they had a duty to further educate themselves, when necessary, by researching in other nations, and bringing foreign experts to Guatemala to help guide the reform programs. In creating a social security system, the government sent Lic. José Rolz Bennet to the United States, Canada, Cuba and Mexico to research their social security programs,<sup>15</sup> and U.S. experts on social security were brought to Guatemala. In the Ministry of Economy, a large number of foreign specialists worked as advisors.<sup>16</sup> Juan José Orozco Posadas traveled to the United States,

Mexico, and Cuba, to study programs designed to protect the rights of children, and to ameliorate the condition of children born into poverty. In order to help modernize the national police, in 1946 Edwin L. Sweet of the United States was hired to teach at the police academy.<sup>17</sup>

Another goal of the Arévalo administration was to reform the economy, and at the same time weaken the power held by the elite groups and foreign businesses. Although they largely failed in this last regard, the reformers managed to run a generally successful economy that brought many Guatemalans increased benefits, and laid a framework of reform that should have eventually provided some long term solutions to old economic problems. The Arevalistas benefited from treasury surpluses accumulated during World War II; and during Arévalo's presidency, Guatemalan exports (dominated by coffee, bananas, and chicle) continued in strong demand in the United States.<sup>18</sup> The Arevalistas were thus able to promote their reforms with very little foreign aid, and at the end of fiscal year 1948-1949 owed an external debt of only \$670,000, making the interest and amortization charges "of negligible size."<sup>19</sup> Government income for fiscal 1950-1951 was 44,975,780 Quetzales, the budget that year was 48,948,280 Quetzales.<sup>20</sup> (Government

income in 1944 had been 18,200,000 Quetzales, and Ubico's last approved budget had been 11,868,384.)<sup>21</sup> The real gross national product and real per capita income rose significantly under Arévalo.<sup>22</sup>

U.S. Embassy reports indicate a continued strength in the Guatemalan economy. The annual economic report for 1949 called the Guatemalan economy "reasonably stable," and in spite of rainstorms that had caused considerable damage, the year "ended in an atmosphere of prosperity."<sup>23</sup> Industrial production of sugar, matches, electric power, alcoholic beverages, cement, cigarettes, flour, private construction, and slaughterhouse output, all increased. "On the whole, 1949 was a satisfactory year for industry."<sup>24</sup> Guatemala City and vicinity consumed 50,642,000 kilowatt hours in 1949, an increase of some 5,000,000 kilowatts from 1948. Electric plant facilities were significantly extended in other areas of Guatemala, and at least nine rural villages received electric light.<sup>25</sup> Also in 1949, rural and urban bus traffic strongly increased, and air service expanded, as did the number of roads. Eleven bridges were built, and Guatemala City received an automatic telephone system.<sup>26</sup> For 1950, U.S. Embassy reports indicate that economic expansion continued, and stability remained.<sup>27</sup> Imports for the first 10 months of 1950 were \$59,598,000, with

exports of \$54,178,000, resulting in a modest deficit of \$5,420,000.<sup>28</sup> Foreign exchange reserves on December 31, 1950, remained at \$39,400,000. Reserves had increased \$1,333,000 in 1950, although there had been a decrease of \$9,286,000 in 1949. For the first month of 1951, the Embassy reported that "business in general was good," and "retail sales in most lines equaled or surpassed January 1950 and January 1949."<sup>29</sup> Jim Handy correctly noted that the economy "was in significantly better shape in 1951 than it had been in 1944." From this he concluded that "the economic policy of the Arévalo administration proved to be a modest success,"<sup>30</sup> although it is naturally difficult to determine what part governmental actions played in the economy's overall performance.

Taking advantage of their strong economy, the Arevalistas had enacted some important reforms. Among other measures, new money and banking laws helped modernize the monetary system, and a reorganized national bank, the Banco de Guatemala, was inaugurated July 1, 1946.<sup>31</sup> The national bank would be autonomous from the government, and its services open to all citizens and all economic interests of Guatemala. Government policies under Arévalo in general favored the expansion of agricultural production, and the staples of the average Guatemalan (corn, rice, and beans) increased.<sup>32</sup> An

autonomous governmental development agency, the Instituto de Fomento de la Producción (INFOP), began operations in early 1949, working with an initial budget of 6.5 million Quetzales. INFOP policies helped increase agricultural production, stimulate industry, and raise the general standard of living of the nation. INFOP, among other things, had the authority to provide loans and farming supplies to small farmers, begin projects of irrigation and other improvements, buy and sell both crops and land, colonize new land, establish industrial enterprises, undergo programs of research, grant industrial loans, improve transportation and promote low cost housing. INFOP promoted a crop diversification program, which soon began to have some successes, particularly with cotton.<sup>33</sup> The Departamento de la Vivienda Popular, a department of INFOP, was entrusted to make investigations of the housing problem, help plan and execute housing projects, give loans, guarantee mortgages, etc. The department received 2 million Quetzales for the first year, with the promise of about 250,000 for a subsequent annual budget.<sup>34</sup> To further alleviate the housing problems of the Guatemalan poor, the Rent Control law of 1949 created rent ceilings, protected tenants from eviction, and prohibited discrimination on grounds of race,

religion, and nationality, or against families with children.<sup>35</sup>

Students, professionals, and the middle class in general received many benefits after the revolution. They secured government positions, and when programs for reform were enacted, they filled most of the leadership posts. The Arévalo government devoted about one-third of the state expenditures to education and social welfare, including the construction of schools, hospitals, and housing, all of which needed professional planning and supervision. The university received autonomy, and went into a period of bureaucratic and educational reform. Educators, artists, and intellectuals also benefited from the relative political freedom and the various government programs. In five years, according to one source, more books were imported and more bookstores founded than in the previous 50 years.<sup>36</sup>

The creative and artistic climate of the Arévalo years was reflected in the appearance of numerous publications of intellectual quality. The Revista de Guatemala, founded in 1945, became one of the most prestigious cultural magazines in the Hispanic world.<sup>37</sup> In the pages of the Revista, Guatemalans, Mexicans, Spaniards, and others, many of them already well known, published fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and book reviews.

The Revista emphasized artistic and literary themes, and remained open to all writers of merit, no matter what their political ideology.<sup>38</sup> Politically, however, the Revista supported the Arévalo government, and it retained a Marxist tone in its articles and comments on politics. The Revista de Economía, to name another example, devoted itself exclusively to economic issues. In 1949, its articles included a comparison of the social security systems in Guatemala and the United States, and an article on banking by Dr. Raúl Prebisch, who would soon become Latin America's best known economist. The Universidad de San Carlos, established on the first anniversary of the Revolution, dedicated itself to the concerns of the university.

The Arévalo government contributed in a number of ways to the creation of quality publications. In 1946, for example, an Arévalo decree established "Los Clásicos del Istmo," a program designed to publish the outstanding literary works of the last 125 years, from the five Central American nations. Also in 1946, Arévalo established a monthly pension of 300 Quetzales for each of three outstanding Guatemalan authors, based solely on literary merit, in order to encourage the labor of others. (One recipient was a political conservative.) After five years of the literacy crusade, the Ministry of

Education noted that the people who could now read needed books, cheaply and easily obtained. So, on 27 October, 1950, the Ministry created the Biblioteca de Cultura Popular "20 de Octubre," which was to be a series of works of educational and cultural merit, mass produced and sold at a very low price. The first volume was: Rafael Landívar, el poeta de Guatemala.

The Arevalista reform movement inspired some of the artists to become politically involved. Working through publications, exhibitions, concerts and lectures, they felt it their duty to promote national reform programs. A partial list of outstanding names would include Otto Raúl González, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Manuel Galich. Asturias, a later Nobel prize winner, promoted pro-revolution themes in his books Viento fuerte (1950), and El papa verde (1954). Talented young writers and artists particularly attracted to the political left formed themselves into the small group called Saker-Ti (a Quiché word meaning "dawn"). A typical Saker-Ti notice in the Diario de la Mañana claimed, "We are carrying our force to the popular classes."<sup>39</sup>

One manner in which middle class reformers exercised their leadership involved efforts to ameliorate the condition of the Indian. The integration of the

Indian into the national culture was seen as "the cornerstone of progress" for Guatemala, but the Indian would be allowed to live free in his "particular environment," and "conserve his authentic way of life."<sup>40</sup> In order to assist in this endeavor, the Instituto Indigenista Nacional was created by the government in August, 1945. It was placed officially under the auspices of the Ministry of Education but had an advisory board that included scholars, a representative from the Asociación Guatemalteca de Agricultores, and representatives from the ministries of education, economy, agriculture, public health, and government. The Instituto aimed to "elevate the cultural, social, and economic level of the indigenous groups"<sup>41</sup> by means of research, the promotion of conferences and discussions, and the publication of its findings. These measures, of course, did little to immediately help the Indian overcome poverty and oppression, but the work of the Institute represented, and reinforced, a broad commitment to justice and improvement.

A number of reform programs did in fact affect the condition of the rural population in general and the Indian in particular. Some Guatemalan towns received roads, improved housing, water, electricity, and other material aids. Political activity and social change were

promoted by the "misiones culturales," the political parties, unions, and government propaganda in general. New awareness resulted, and virtually all department capitals of Guatemala underwent some political changes.<sup>42</sup> In San Antonio Sacatepéquez, for example, the ladinos had long excluded the Indians from power. During Arévalo's term of office, the Indians became politicized and began to openly challenge the ladinos.<sup>43</sup> As early as 1945, the Indians in San Luis Jilotepeque had become active in local politics.<sup>44</sup>

A new awareness of women's rights had also surfaced with the revolution. Women had gained respect from their active participation in the overthrow of Ubico and Ponce, and their new involvement in the political process. Although only literate women had been given the vote, women activists continued to work for complete suffrage. One group of women who identified with the ideals of the Revolution formed the Alianza Democrática Femenina Guatemalteca y Panamericana.

A number of specific programs for children began under Arévalo. The Comedores Infantiles (children's kitchens) provided food for a limited number of disadvantaged children, and the Guarderías Nacionales (day nurseries) provided care for the children of women working in the market place. Income from pinball and slot

machines, private donations, and government appropriations funded these small scale programs.<sup>45</sup> Leo Suslow in 1949 found the children's kitchens in Guatemala City neat and comfortable, and the children happy. "Lunch at a kitchen center included a large portion of beef stew, bread, and milk."<sup>46</sup> On 20 June 1947, the Ministry of Education began a special national lottery, with the profits reserved for children's education. One man who deserves much credit for the establishment of children's aid programs was Juan José Orozco Posadas, RN member and early advocate of Arévalo for President.

Penitentiary reform and other changes in the Penal Code also concerned the Arévalo government. Just 7 days after his inauguration, Arévalo directed his Minister of Government to "investigate the judicial situation of all and each one of the prisoners, with the goal to mitigate, as much as possible, their conditions."<sup>47</sup> The government also directed that anyone who remained incarcerated for 5 or more months must be taught how to read and write.<sup>48</sup>

It was characteristic of Arévalo's style of government that he was not willing to rely exclusively on formal programs and legislation to change his promises into reality. He thus demonstrated a willingness to give personal and individual help to those in need. Arévalo,

from the beginning of his presidency, received large numbers of letters and petitions from all parts of Guatemala informing him of injustices and needs; requests and complaints.<sup>49</sup> Arévalo paid serious attention to these letters, making his own suggestions and orders, or passing them on to other officials to be investigated. Many of the President's instructions were written in his own handwriting, leaving no doubt of his personal interest.

People expected the help of their new President in numerous ways. They wanted his intervention in family problems, between parents and offspring, among relatives. Letters came from relatives of prison inmates. One destitute old woman had relied on her daughter for life support, but her daughter had been jailed for drinking "a little corn beer."<sup>50</sup> Villages requested water, electricity, a cemetery. Ladinos expressed fear that Indians were becoming too forward, and demanding too much. Indians complained about the domination of ladinos, and property disputes were common. Local officials were sometimes unworthy. A village in the department of Sololá declared that the mayor sold public trees for private profit, coerced local elections, and "in the night entered the women's jail to make evil use of the prisoners."<sup>51</sup>

The documents often do not indicate how, or if, the problems were resolved, but they do indicate that Arévalo took his correspondence seriously, and that he often gave orders to solve the issue in question. For example, when the mother of an ill, eleven year old girl wrote the President, complaining that the father had refused to maintain or educate the child, President Arévalo ordered that the man must help.<sup>52</sup> The mayor of Chiquimulilla asked for musical instruments; he was sure that Guatemala City had extras not being used. Arévalo wrote a memo to the Minister of Government, instructing him to try to find the instruments. "I am interested," wrote Arévalo.<sup>53</sup> In another case, a boy claimed to be destitute, with a mother to take care of: he wanted a job as office boy at the government palace, so he could attend school. Arévalo directed that the boy be given a job at the first opportunity.<sup>54</sup>

A most pathetic letter came from Mrs. Kalksteen Rombaut. She explained that she was of foreign birth, and had immigrated to Guatemala in 1931. She and her husband, with only five Quetzales in assets, found work in a pastry shop. They lived poor, and worked sixteen years without rest. Her husband never took her anywhere, and finally began to beat her. Also, she had to work harder than he did. She bore two children, but then her

husband forced her to have a sterilization operation. Her husband was, after all, despotic and cruel. The letter, three full pages of small type, went into great detail. Arévalo directed the letter to Francisco Valdés, the Minister of Government, and wrote: "Paco Valdés: another drama! Let's see what we might do." Subsequent pages attached to the letter in the archives, signed by the national Chief of Police, show that the police were busy finding out the facts, and trying to resolve the women's problems.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the correspondence he received, Arévalo sent investigative teams into the countryside to find out the needs and desires, large and small, of the people. On the basis of the reports of these teams, Arévalo might send technocrats to specific villages, or arrange a loan for developing a water supply. In one case, a village requested three costumes for musicians in the religious ceremony of a cofradía: Arévalo consented, and directed that the bill be sent to his office.<sup>56</sup> Arévalo also made personal promises, face to face, when he traveled in the country. The President received a couple of letters of follow-up, reminding him of his promises, in one case to make a son take care of his mother; in another case to free a woman's husband from

jail, that he might take care of the woman and her children.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of the commendable goals, and significant successes, the reformers of the Arévalo period still faced huge national problems in 1951. Beginnings had been made, and life for many families had improved. But "old Guatemala" had not yet transformed itself into a "new Guatemala." In 1950, one economic study found that, in spite of advances made under Arévalo, "limited markets, inadequate agricultural production, high cost of raw materials, lack of an integrated transportation system, shortages of capital and credit, obsolete technology, traditional policies of high profit margins at the expense of sales volume, inadequate nutrition, and poor education of workers," all conspired "to inhibit the growth of industry."<sup>58</sup> El Imparcial reported that malnutrition, unsanitary housing, malaria, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites, typhoid, and alcoholism remained major health problems. Calorie intake stayed 20% below minimal standards; total protein 15%; and animal protein 60%.<sup>59</sup> Despite literacy campaigns, the 1950 census discovered that illiterates made up 71.9% of the population over age seven. Although credible estimates for the illiteracy rate under Ubico are unavailable, it is unlikely that the Arevalistas had made great

progress. From the revolution to the end of Arévalo's term in office, the total population increased about 400,000;<sup>61</sup> and people who learned to read only numbered about 82,000.<sup>62</sup> Annual wages remained low, about 100 to 200 Quetzales for the rural worker and about 360 to 1200 in Guatemala City.<sup>60</sup> Export earnings continued to rely heavily on coffee.

In 1950, a Pan American Union study on housing in Guatemala reported that the typical rural family still lived in a primitive hut of one room, dirt floors, and thatched roofs.<sup>63</sup> In the capital, which received about 3,000 rural families a year, thousands of families lived in "flimsy shacks."<sup>64</sup> The report noted that the government was trying to mitigate the hardships, had made some advances, and had passed new laws that were "well framed and broad in scope."<sup>65</sup> It calculated, however, that in order to overcome present housing deficiencies and meet the needs of the growing population, the government would have to allocate about one quarter of its budget to housing for 25 years.<sup>66</sup> This is something Guatemala was clearly not in a position to do.

Some observers of the Arévalo period have pointed out various problems within the government itself that may have slowed progress. Suslow believed that bureaucratic conflicts between the Instituto Guatemalteco

de Seguridad Social and the Ministry of Public Health delayed social security benefits, and that the "rapid turnover" of public health ministers damaged UNICEF efforts to promote health care programs for Guatemalan children.<sup>67</sup> El Imparcial likewise complained of a lack of coordination between branches of government, and the lost time, lost energy, and "money invested in things stupid and crazy."<sup>68</sup> Arévalo has been criticized for constructing a large expensive sports center, for the 6th Caribbean Olympics of 1950, when so many needed housing and basic care; one critic called the stadium "that white elephant of the Revolution."<sup>69</sup> Jorge García Granados claimed that the government put too much money into education and political propaganda, when Guatemala actually needed first of all an economic infrastructure.<sup>70</sup>

But many of the claims of the critics have been poorly substantiated, and often they were politically motivated. Certainly, the reformers deserve a measure of blame, as in the many cases of working at cross purposes among themselves. Policy mistakes were indubitably made. But the reformers also had to contend with vast poverty, ignorance, and general backwardness, on a scale that solidly defied any short-term solutions. At the same time, a strong opposition worked against

reform. All in all, in consideration of the obstacles, the Arevalistas enacted praiseworthy reforms and made some progress toward carrying them out. The social and economic welfare of the "people" had become a government priority.

#### Notes

1. Eric Goldman, The Crucial Decade (New York, 1956), 121.

2. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, "No hay que tener miedo," (leaflet) Nov. 24, 1948, AGC, Unfiled papers and documents for 1949.

3. José Castro, La revolución desde el poder: viaje de ida y vuelta a Guatemala (La Habana, 1948), 4.

4. Anita Frankel, "Political Development in Guatemala, 1945-1954: The Impact of Foreign, Military, and Religious Elites" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1969), 169. For particulars on the Church, see Chapter 8.

5. Adler, Public Finance, 72-3.

6. Silvert, A Study in Government, 34; González, Historia, 370. González notes that education held fifth place in Ubico's budget.

7. Juan José Arévalo, Seis años de gobierno, vol.2 (Guatemala, 1987), 184-5.

8. Suslow, "Social Reforms," 45. One Quetzal equalled one dollar.

9. Ministerio de Gobernación to Gobernador Departmental, June 4, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios.

10. Arévalo, Seis años, II, 42, 103, 186.

11. Juan José Arévalo, Que significan las escuelas "federacion"; solución Guatimalteca en un conflicto universal entre la arquitectura y la pedagogía (Guatemala, 1949), *passim*.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Jorge Arriola, interview with author, Guatemala City, June 20, 1987; González, Historia, 370, 434. Some of these schools remain in existence, and they retain a good reputation.

14. Arévalo, Seis años, II, 182; González, Historia, 370, 434.

15. Juan José Arévalo, "El doctor Juan José Arévalo habla sobre el régimen de Seguridad Social," Prensa Libre, Feb. 8, 1985, p.5.

16. El Imparcial, April 3, 1979.

17. Memoria de Ministerio de Gobernación, p.52, March 1, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios.

18. John Hans Adler, Eugene R. Schlesinger, and Ernest C. Olson, Public Finance and Economic Development in Guatemala (Stanford, 1952), 20, 32-33.

19. *Ibid.*, 276.

20. Arévalo, Seis años, II, 178-179.

21. *Ibid.*, 178; Silvert, A Study in Government, 35; Adler, Public Finance, 29; Mario Monteforte Toledo, Guatemala, monografía sociología (Mexico, 1959), 551. Some of the figures cited by the above authors do not agree.

22. Adler, Public Finance, 28-30; Monteforte Toledo, Monografía, 579-86.

23. Gilbert E. Larsen to Department of State, "Annual Economic Report-1949," p.2, NAUS 814.00/4-1050.

24. *Ibid.*, p.4.

25. *Ibid.*, p.26.

26. Ibid., pp.33-37.
27. NAUS 814.00/2-350; 3-350; 3-2950; 4-2750; 6-3050; 8-450; 8-850; 9-150; 9-2850; 11-350; 12-150; 12-2950.
28. NAUS 814.00/2-251.
29. Ibid.
30. Jim Handy, "Revolution and Reaction: National Policy and Rural Politics in Guatemala, 1944-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 106; see also: Alfonso Bauer Paiz, "La revolución Guatemalteca del 20 de octubre de 1944 y sus proyecciones económico-sociales," Alero, 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), 62-64.
31. Robert R. Hendon, Jr., "Some Recent Economic Reforms in Guatemala" (M.A. thesis, 1949), 123; Adler, Public Finance, 20; Monteforte Toledo, Monografía, 568.
32. Handy, "Revolution," 103.
33. Monteforte Toledo, Monografía, 450-1.
34. Anatole A. Solow, Housing in Guatemala (Washington D.C., 1950), 34.
35. Ibid., 33.
36. Mario Monteforte Toledo, La Revolución de Guatemala 1944-1954 (Guatemala, 1975), 20.
37. Rodney T. Rodriguez, Revista de Guatemala: Índice Literario (Guatemala, 1987), 1.
38. Ibid., 9.
39. "El grupo Saker-Ti," Diario de la Mañana, Sunday Supplement, Jan. 15, 1950.
40. Boletín del Instituto Indigenista Nacional, 1:1 (Oct.-Dec. 1945), 3,41. See also: NAUS 814.011/2-2645 no.2191.
41. Ibid., 29.
42. Adams, Crucifixion, 187.

43. Robert Ewald, "San Antonio Sacatepéquez 1932-1953," in Political Changes in Guatemalan Indian Communities, ed. Richard Newbold Adams (Michigan, 1957), 20.

44. John Gillin, "San Luis Jilotepeque 1942-1955," in Adams, Political Changes, 25.

45. Leo A. Suslow, "Social Security in Guatemala: A Case Study in Bureaucracy and Social Welfare Planning" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1954), 37.

46. Ibid.

47. Julio César Méndez Montenegro to Ministro de Gobernación, March 22, 1945, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

48. Valdes to Gobernadores, Feb. 14, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios.

49. Documents in AGC show that hundreds of letters and petitions reached Arévalo's office before the end of 1945, and continued to arrive thereafter.

50. No. 298 clas. 540, Jan. 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

51. No. 7320 clas. 42.7, Jan. 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

52. No. 2364 clas. 021-9-D, Feb. 1947, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la Republica.

53. No.540, August 14, 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la Republica.

54. No. 159 clas. 660-ch, Jan. 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

55. Angela Luisa Kalksteen Rombaut to Arévalo, Sept. 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

56. No. 3685 Ref. 312.4, August 20, 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la Republica.

57. No. 4932 ref. 102-fac., Feb. 4, 1947, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la Republica.

58. G.E. Britnell, "Problems of Economic and Social Change in Guatemala," The Canadian Journal of Economy and Political Science, 17:4 (Nov. 1951), 475.
59. El Imparcial, May 7, 1951, cited in Suslow, "Social Security," 32.
60. Solow, Housing, 19; NAUS 814/4-2050, p.10.
61. Monteforte Toledo, Monografía, 41.
62. Manuel Chavarría Flores, Analfabetismo en Guatemala (Guatemala, 1952), 85,98, cited in González, Historia, 404.
63. Solow, Housing, 13.
64. Ibid., 12, 15.
65. Ibid., 35.
66. Ibid., 3.
67. Suslow, "Social Security," 38,288.
68. El Imparcial, Oct. 19, 1948, p.5.
69. Elly Rodríguez González, "Silva Falla merece mi respeto," La Hora, April 10, 1958.
70. El Imparcial, May 7, 1946; for the same viewpoint, see Silvert, A Study in Government, 45.

CHAPTER 6  
POLICIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE  
AREVALISTAS:  
PART TWO

The Arévalo period produced neither a "rural revolution," nor an "urban revolution." It was instead a "revolution" that embraced the entire nation in its origin and in its unfolding. Certainly, in isolated areas of the republic some people were unaware of the changes taking place, and nearly all of the activity, particularly in 1944, took place in Guatemala City. But the revolution of October 1944 and the Arevalista movement that grew out of it received impetus from both rural and urban Guatemala, and the Arevalista government included the entire nation in its reform policies.

In 1944, the political parties had endeavored to promote revolt beyond Guatemala City, the center of activities, and create a genuine national revolution. The Frente Popular Libertador (FPL) and to a lesser degree the Partido Renovación Nacional (RN), had begun working in 1944 to organize party chapters throughout the nation, particularly with the help of rural-based teachers.<sup>1</sup> El Progreso, which received an FPL chapter on

July 25, 1944, experienced violence between Arevalistas and Poncistas in September.<sup>2</sup> Violence also occurred in Mazatenango, Quetzaltenango, and Chiquimula.<sup>3</sup>

Initial reforms would be obtained most easily in urban areas, which could be more easily reached by the national governmental apparatus, but the Arevalistas believed that urban reform alone could not possibly modernize Guatemala. The Arevalistas also understood that any political party or group that wanted political power needed to obtain the vote of the countryside, where the majority of eligible voters lived. The power of the rural vote was seen in 1950, when Arbenz failed to carry the majority in Guatemala City, but won the presidential elections based on his win in the rural areas. Furthermore, the rural voters had to be released from the domination of the large landholders, who in 1945, and in many cases beyond, continued to retain much influence over the workers and local officials.<sup>4</sup>

Two great issues of the utmost controversy, labor reform and land reform, would mark the Arévalo period. The Arevalistas hoped that these reforms would transform the nation, and destroy the traditional land and work patterns that kept the majority of Guatemalans in a state of exploitation and misery. The issue of labor reform

was treated first, and new laws and government policies would greatly benefit the workers under Arévalo.

Unions began to form openly during the summer of 1944, and the Arévalo government and the Arevalista political parties throughout the Arévalo period, encouraged union growth and the promotion of workers' rights. Increasingly, however, union members gained political power and were able to advance their demands autonomously. By 1950, more than 150 unions existed with nearly 100,000 members. Unions helped their members during periods of emergency, such as sickness or natural disaster, and they helped formulate proposals for new labor laws.<sup>5</sup> Unions also served to watch for labor law infractions by the employers.<sup>6</sup>

New labor laws gave the workers many benefits. The most far-reaching measure was the labor code of May 1, 1947, later expanded by amendments in 1948. Edwin Bishop correctly noted that the code was "fairly drawn, well-written and comprehensive."<sup>7</sup> It established provisions for severance pay for discharged workers, collective bargaining, overtime pay, compulsory contracts between labor and management, minimum wages, the right to strike, guaranteed vacations and other rights recognized by the 1945 constitution. The Inspección General de Trabajo, charged with overseeing infractions of the code,

obtained extensive indemnities for the workers between 1947 and 1950.<sup>8</sup> In 1949, the office worked on 4,016 disputes and directed employers to pay over \$100,000 to workers, most of which covered unjustified discharge from employment.<sup>9</sup> If the Inspección General could not settle the complaint, it was passed on to another new agency, the Tribunales de Trabajo.

Initially labor reform affected primarily urban areas, but organized labor also made advances in the agrarian sector. Labor activity took place early on national fincas and on the relatively advanced farms of the United Fruit Company. In 1949 there were forty-six farm unions, and many more were being formed.<sup>10</sup> In 1950, the Confederación Nacional Campesina de Guatemala (CNCG) was founded, and soon became an influential voice for peasant labor.

Archer Bush concluded in 1950 that the unions and the labor codes had had a positive effect on the workers. Wage increases, better working conditions, and job security represented part of the advances. Self-respect and "psychological satisfactions" resulted from the working man's new status, along with feelings of increased prestige and social unity. The unions, wrote Bush, were "forming the backbone of a new social group," in Guatemala.<sup>11</sup>

Workers also received benefits from the Instituto Guatemalteco de Seguridad Social (IGSS), an autonomous and nominally obligatory system which began operation on January 2, 1948. IGSS benefits would eventually include coverage for accidents, maternity, illness, old age, and death.<sup>12</sup> The IGSS planners realized they faced a lack of trained personnel and medical facilities, public ignorance, insufficient funds, and a lack of accurate data; therefore they planned a gradual program that would cover the entire nation only after ten years.<sup>13</sup> Urban workers received the first benefits, because an urban infrastructure made the administrative tasks much easier. After six months, the program insured 80,000 workers, and after one year it insured 140,000 workers. During the first year, it paid out Q498,382 in benefits.<sup>14</sup> In mid-1950, a U.S. Embassy economic report on the previous six months noted that "the successful social security program continued to make gains."<sup>15</sup> By March 31, 1951, more than 170,000 received IGSS coverage, the majority being not urban but rural workers.<sup>16</sup> Leo Suslow believed that a significant improvement occurred in the well-being of the covered workers. Although Suslow knew of no specific studies that dealt with the effect which the IGSS had on Guatemala's Indians, he noted that "one still cannot ignore the direct observation of Indians in

hospitals, Indians in the rehabilitation centers, and Indians receiving cash benefits and pensions."<sup>17</sup>

Many reformers believed that it was crucial to enact far-reaching land reform, meaning the partition and redistribution of large land holdings, along with other measures to aid the campesino. The Comité-Político Ferrocarrilero, a union political committee, defined the importance of land reform in a manifesto of December 1949.

By means of agrarian reform our agricultural production will be increased to new levels, new horizons will be opened up to our industry, our internal market will be expanded and new human masses will be incorporated with the capacity of consumers. To carry out agrarian reform means to modernize and mechanize agricultural exploitation, to develop a national industry based upon domestic raw materials, to substantially improve the living conditions of the working population, elevating its welfare and its cultural level.<sup>18</sup>

In 1947, Max Ricardo Cuenca, writing in the Revista de Guatemala, argued that without land reform Guatemala would remain a weak, underdeveloped nation, unable to achieve modernization and independence from the United States and other world powers. "Only with agrarian reform can democracy be consolidated, the country industrialized, hunger and misery liquidated, culture developed, Central America united, and Belize recovered."<sup>19</sup>

Letters and petitions requesting new land, the return of stolen land, and help with boundary disputes, predated Arévalo's inauguration, and continued thereafter. In some villages, people banded into "Comités Pro-Tierras" to jointly fight for local land rights, as they did in Ayarza, Santa Rosa.<sup>20</sup> Examples of the requests could include the petition from San Sebastián Caotán, asking the President to help the campesinos, and give them free land, "as has been done for other people."<sup>21</sup> A petition, signed in 1947 by 55 men from San Agustín Acasaguastlán, claimed that the large landowners and the mayor were stealing communal land, crops, trees, and the labor of workers.<sup>22</sup>

Arevalista political parties and unions included land reform among their platform goals, and some of the more zealous members, especially in PAR, began working in 1944 and 1945 for more equitable distribution of the nation's land. In 1946, the second congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CTG) demanded "democratic agrarian reform."<sup>23</sup> The first "great convention" of the Federación Sindical de Guatemala (FSG), in June 1947, called the land reform problem "urgent." Jim Handy noted that "every major economic publication in the country not linked to the landowners'

associations argued periodically that the agrarian structure of the country needed to be altered."<sup>24</sup>

The Arévalo government, however, had to approach the land reform issue with caution. The great landholders retained much economic power, and opposed any significant reform. But worry centered also on the peasants themselves. Reformers wondered if an orderly program of land reform could be devised that would not degenerate into massive land takeovers by peasants suddenly overwhelmed by greed and high expectations. The countryside was indeed an area of potential rebellion, and it appeared that "agitators," i.e. extremist leaders, were preparing the campesinos for confrontation. Indeed, a number of land invasions did occur. Arévalo himself advocated a cautious route to land reform. In a January, 1945 interview, Arévalo stated that poor farmers needed more land, cheap credit, and expert instruction, but reforms would be made only after extensive and careful study.<sup>25</sup> Many reformers agreed with Arévalo. The FSG political statement of 1947, for example, had noted the "urgent" need for land reform, which must be implemented to put an end to feudalism. All the people would have to join together in the "revolutionary fight." But the statement also declared that FSG opposed demagogues, who misled the campesinos, and put the national economy in

danger. In Guatemala, "there is no need to provoke difficult situations," because the nation possesses "land in abundance."<sup>26</sup>

In 1946, several large meetings took place between department governors, town mayors, and representatives from the central government. Those who attended approved a number of "agreements" that would be reflective of the government's initial caution, and the strong local influence still retained by the large landowners. Concern for peace and economic stability ranked high, and the participants agreed on the "persecution and elimination" of political agitators "who exploit and incite the campesinos to rebellion." Also, vagrancy in all forms must be prosecuted, and landowners who comply with the humanitarian needs of the workers must be protected. The participants offered a few minor suggestions to improve the life of the worker; for example, the promotion of sports and inexpensive work tools, and the discouragement of drinking alcoholic beverages. In sum, it was agreed that the needs of landowners and workers had to be recognized; and rural relations harmonized.<sup>27</sup>

On July 2, 1947, a circular sent to all department governors by the Ministry of Government ordered that anyone who advocated the violent seizure of private land

must be punished severely. It must not be allowed that agitators compel campesinos or workers to join or form associations that work toward taking land from the owners. The governors must "proceed with great energy against the agitators, consigning them immediately to the tribunals of justice." Victor Manuel Gutiérrez and other labor leaders protested to Arévalo, claiming that the circular would be used to unjustly harass the workers and campesinos, and protect the enemies of the revolution.<sup>28</sup> These complaints were largely unjustified, for the government continued to work for rural reform, even while it tried to maintain rural peace.

Outbreaks of violence attributed to agitators were not rare. For example, the Arévalo administration in early 1946 forced CTG leader Amor Velasco from his post in the municipality of Malacatán because of charges that Velasco was inciting local Indians to seize private landholdings.<sup>29</sup> Also in 1946, in another case, the government instructed the police in Malacatán to arrest the campesino leaders of a local farm union. Several days after the arrests, while the Malacatán Chief of Police was driving to Guatemala City with his wife, a group of campesinos attacked him, in reprisal for the arrest of their leaders. The chief's wife received some injuries.<sup>30</sup> In early 1948, for another example,

political disturbances in El Tumbador, San Marcos, culminated in the killing of the town mayor by Indians from neighboring farms. Some local members of PAR had allegedly incited the Indians with Marxist demagogic, and spent several years in jail for their crimes.<sup>31</sup>

Between 1945 and 1951, the Arévalo government managed to enact only a few reforms that dealt with land. The government was, however, able to experiment with cooperatives, collectives, and land grants in the farms under its control.<sup>32</sup> The Arévalo administration directly administered a number of lands and plantations, some of which had been confiscated from the dictator and his followers, while others had been confiscated from Germans during World War II. In 1949, there were over 100 government controlled farms and plantations, which supplied about 11% of government income.<sup>33</sup> In one case, Arévalo himself ordered that the entire farm "Yerba Buena" be given to the campesinos of Cuilco, Huehuetenango.<sup>34</sup>

Outside of the government farms, the desire for reform was expressed primarily by ongoing research projects. Within the Arévalo administration, by February 1946, the Dirección General de Colonización y Tierras, under the Ministry of Agriculture, was investigating land reform projects.<sup>35</sup> In 1947, Congress created the

Comisión de Estudios Agrarios, which began its own investigations on land reform needs. In 1948, Congress passed the Law of Expropriation, which permitted the state to seize property, if compensated at a fair price, in order to satisfy the public material or spiritual welfare. On December 21, 1949, ostensibly in order to overcome food shortages after extensive hurricane damage, the government promulgated the "law of forced rental." It was the first law to seriously affect landowners, and at the time it caused great controversy. The law mandated that landowners who had been renting land for the past four years must continue renting those lands for two more years, and rent to peasants at a fair price any land left uncultivated. The rent could not exceed ten percent of the farmer's products, paid in money or in kind. Fines for violation were only 10 to 50 Quetzales, but the law successfully benefited the renters, and directly led into more extensive reforms under the next administration.<sup>36</sup> Other efforts at reform included colonization programs that tried to mitigate land problems with population resettlement. Because of geographic and financial obstacles, few areas were actually colonized.<sup>37</sup>

The failure of the Arevalistas to enact profound land reforms caused much unhappiness. Typical of the

complaints sent to Arévalo was one from the people of San Miguel Dueñas, who by August of 1947 had become displeased with the government's handling of a local land dispute. The matter had been passed from the Minister of Government, to the Minister of Communications, to Agriculture, and back to Government, without resolution. The petitioners praised the President, but damned those who worked for him. "But, Mr. President, your Ministers have defrauded you," the petition claimed.<sup>38</sup>

But the progress in bringing the nation significant land reform went further than the laws themselves would indicate. Increasing political awareness in the rural areas resulted from official education programs and the efforts of political parties and unions. The land reform issue became widely discussed, in and out of the government, and specific proposals on land reform were increasingly made. When the Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical (CNUS) presented its detailed plan for agrarian reform in September, 1949, the result of much preparation, the nation went into open debate. In 1950, a special committee in Congress began drawing up its own comprehensive land reform proposal. The issue of land reform, it became apparent, had reached maturity.

Arévalo was no wild-eyed radical, nor were the great majority of the Arevalista reformers. They

dedicated themselves to modernization and social justice while they rejected extreme measures. Persons of the far political left find the Arevalista reforms minor, which they certainly were, compared with, for example, what Castro would eventually do in Cuba. But the Arevalistas were serious about changing Guatemala in major ways. Their goals were high: they expected to accomplish a lot. They would become very frustrated, and some would become increasingly radicalized, when success seemed to elude them.

#### Notes

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3. Herrera, Guatemala, 72.
4. Edwin W. Bishop, "The Guatemalan Labor Movement, 1944-1959," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1959), 73-4, 76.
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6. Ibid., part 3, p.38.
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30. No.601, June 4, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.
31. NAUS 814.00/1-1348 no.27.
32. Suslow, "Social Reforms," 49,68.
33. Gilbert E. Larsen to Department of State, "6-months economic report," NAUS 814.00/8-850; José M. Ayabar de Soto, Dependency and Intervention: The Case of Guatemala in 1954 (Boulder, 1978), 128.
34. Acuerdo, May 3, 1947, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Correspondencia.
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CHAPTER 7  
THE BREAKDOWN OF REVOLUTIONARY UNITY

The success of the revolutionaries of 1944 in destroying the dictatorship had produced much enthusiasm and hope for a better future, but underneath the shared desire for modernization and other general goals existed serious disunity within the Guatemalan polity and society. Conflict and divisions had long characterized Guatemalan society, for example between Indians and ladinos, and between great landlords and the peasants. Even within rural Indian and peasant communities serious class divisions had developed.<sup>1</sup> Factional divisions in Guatemalan national politics had also existed since Guatemala became an independent nation in 1821. In the 1920s, a largely middle-class movement challenged the status quo, but Ubico's dictatorship produced an unwilling peace. Ubico, however, could neither solve Guatemala's historical divisiveness, nor eliminate the reformist challenge to the traditional order.

The "revolutionaries" who had united to overthrow Ubico and Ponce would soon have to contend with serious disagreement among themselves. Many of these differences

became sharply apparent during the Constitutional Assembly of 1945, but hope remained that the various factions would peacefully coexist, so that democracy would prevail. However, as Alfonso Guerra Borges observed, "the particular interests of various groups became clear and their opposing positions hardened, increasingly so, in the development of events"<sup>2</sup>

Some Guatemalans speculated that Guatemalan culture contained an unusually high degree of inherent contentiousness. In an editorial entitled "Brothers or Wild Beasts?", El Imparcial claimed: "In other parts of the world two or more people who are active in different political groups, or profess different ideologies, can discuss, fight verbally in the courts or in the press; but in private or social matters are good friends, or at least they respect each other." But not in Guatemala. All points of contention become personal, a "matter of honor and injured self-love." Prejudice and hate create mountains out of mole hills. The reasoning behind the argument loses importance, and reasoning "can go to the devil," for the only matter that counts "is the quantity of insults, affronts, or calumnies that one accumulates against the adversary."<sup>3</sup> Mary Holleran, a visitor to Guatemala during Arévalo's presidency, had her own view. "Perhaps because the ladino is a racial mixture, blended

of the old world and the new, possessing a split personality, he suffers more from an inferiority complex than anyone else, I think perhaps, in the world. He is an extremist in everything. It is practically impossible to carry on a reasonable argument with him, for, rather than face the inevitable and logical conclusions, he will change the subject and go off on a tangent."<sup>4</sup> These views are, of course, overly harsh. They reflect, however, the volatility which characterized the breakdown of revolutionary unity.

Age differences may have contributed to the breakdown of revolutionary unity. Men and women of all ages joined the revolution, and all ages could be found all over the political spectrum. But it became clear that a deep divide existed between some younger and older revolutionaries; in particular between the so-called "generation of 1920" and the "generation of 1944," with the younger group demanding immediate changes and the older group speaking for caution and restraint. Personal ideology and political tactics played roles in this "generation gap," but a struggle for leadership between the two age groups was also inherent in the conflict.

The appellation, "generation of 1920," identified the group that in their youth had contributed to the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera in 1920, and then worked for

reform in the 1920s. Part of this generation had suffered years of imprisonment and exile while some had managed to fit in or co-exist with the Ubico dictatorship. In general, the "generation of 1920" had been, and remained, less zealous than the young of 1944. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, an outstanding "1920" member, admitted in a newspaper article in 1945 that the 1920 generation had emphasized the concept of "liberty," but had not developed deep patriotic notions about Guatemala as a whole. The youth of 1944, however, embraced nationalism and were "more penetrated with duty."<sup>5</sup> Causes not championed by the 1920 generation included the uplifting of the Indian, land reform, and the readjustment of wealth between the rich and poor.<sup>6</sup> These older revolutionaries, had, however, played a key role in bringing down the dictator, and in creating the new government. Eight members of the 1920 generation, for example, had served on the Constituent Assembly's 15 member drafting committee: Francisco Villagrán, Jorge García Granados, José Falla Arís, Manuel de León Cordona, Jorge Adán Serrano, Clemente Marroquín Rojas, David Vela, and Luis Alberto Paz y Paz. The years of their births were, respectively: 1897, 1900, 1897, 1896, 1897, 1897, 1901, 1894.

Part of the "Generation of 1920," including Guillermo Flores Avendaño and Adán Manrique Ríos, had opposed the Arevalista movement from the beginning. Indeed, whether members of the "Generation of 1920" or not, the great majority of those who led the opposition against Arévalo were of relatively advanced age. Adrián Recinos, who placed second in the 1944 presidential race, was 58 years old, and Manuel María Herrera (3rd place) was about the same.

The greatest amount of zealous energy came from the young; the "generation of 1944." The young, in particular the university students and young professionals, had given the revolution its overwhelming numbers, in part because they themselves were many, in part because they helped organize those workers who had taken part in the fight. In the words of an El Imparcial article, written 30 years after the October revolution, "significant elements of the generation of 1920" participated in the revolution and the "confusing chain" of events that followed, but this generation was greatly overshadowed by the Arevalismo of the young and the popular masses, i.e. "that impressive phenomenon that more than a political phenomenon was a social phenomenon."<sup>7</sup>

It had been the political parties primarily consisting of young members, FPL and RN, that had nominated Arévalo, and these parties had worked the hardest to elect him. Arévalo, in truth, owed his presidency to the young, and as President he did his best to nurture and promote youth in the political process. Even before his nomination, he wrote glowing opinions on the potential of young leadership to bring culture and modernization to Latin America. Marroquín Rojas, writing 15 years after the Revolution, noted Arévalo's own relative youth. "In those days Arévalo was a boy of middle age, ambitious to make a difference, without children to defend, with little in the way of family roots: in a nutshell, he epitomized the young."<sup>8</sup> The 1944 generation, however, without Arévalo's help, had already carved out for itself a large section of the political power structure. The first Congress had no less than 44 students,<sup>9</sup> out of 68 members in total, and FPL and RN were Guatemala's largest and most powerful political parties. By one count, the average age of Congressmen in 1950 was still only 35 years.<sup>10</sup>

Derisively labeled "los chiquilines" ("brash youngsters" or "young idiots") by their critics, the energetic youth that filled the new government angered and irritated many of the 1920 generation. Marroquín

Rojas called the Arevalistas "a virgin youth, passionate, blind, imbued with the liberty recently won by the entire nation, and, of course, leftist."<sup>11</sup> "Los chiquilines," he claimed, would allow into their group only those of the same generation, and they caused "first Silva Peña, then García Granados, then Jorge Toriello, and finally Doctor Julio Bianchi and myself" to be expelled from the Arévalo government.<sup>12</sup>

The "generation of 1920" did not deny the extreme importance of the youth movement in the overthrow of Ubico and Ponce, but they believed that their own role had also been instrumental. (Which in fact it had been.) "Those of '20 were the soul of the movement of '44," wrote Epaminondas Quintana (b.1896).<sup>13</sup> Members of the 1920 generation claimed that it had been their own political party, Partido Social Democrático, that had first organized to combat Ubico, and it had been they who helped organize and finance the young.<sup>14</sup> Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla (b.1898) complained that the young's rejection of the older generation, even those who had remained honorable under Ubico and had helped in his overthrow, caused the initial revolutionary front to divide into two sections, one "formed by men who were older."<sup>15</sup> This older group of men often reached back to glorify their

own youthful revolutionary days of 1920, as they also continually defended their role in the 1944 revolution.

Young revolutionaries felt themselves part of a movement that was separate from the older, generally more cautious reformers. Marco Antonio Villamar Contreras, who was 18 years old in 1944, claims that the young had great confidence in their cause and in their own purity, while they found it difficult to trust the older politicians, especially those "elders" who had not been exiled under Ubico.<sup>16</sup> Arturo Cruz noted that "the old politicians," were the enemies of the revolution.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the Arévalo period, the young received much praise, from both government and private publications, for their role in the overthrow of the dictatorship and their subsequent role in government.<sup>18</sup> Many of the young felt particularly proud of their overwhelming participation in the October revolution. "We students moved the first rock," wrote Mario Silva Jonama.<sup>19</sup> Oscar Benítez admits that his generation came to power with innocence and immaturity, but believes that they therefore had not developed arts of cunning and cajolery, like older politicians. Instead, says Benítez, the young were filled with deep patriotism, nationalism, and exemplary honor.<sup>20</sup>

Fear of the consequences of the participation of Indians and workers in the revolution and the reform movement caused additional conflict within the middle and upper classes. Some reformers, particularly the far left followers of Arévalo, advocated a large political role for the masses, while more cautious Guatemalans feared that Indians and workers who became politically active could become overly demanding and violent. They believed the masses were prone to unrealistic expectations and class conflict, as demonstrated in several incidents just before the Revolution. On September 14, 1944, for example, thousands of campesinos, armed with clubs, marched in the streets of the capital, cheering the Liberal party and General Ponce, who had promised land to those who would support him. The fears of many came true when, with the fall of Ponce, large numbers of Indians in Patzicia, in the department of Chimaltenango, attacked ladinos with hatchets, clubs, and machetes. As they cheered for Ponce, the Indians knocked down the doors of houses, and murdered women, children, and men. Great potential for violence existed, claimed El Imparcial, when demagogues used Indians as a "blind instrument" to obtain political power.<sup>21</sup> As explained in the previous chapter, "agitators" during the Arévalo period would

continue to rally the workers and campesinos to greater political action, and sometimes violence.

Disagreements broke out most forcefully and clearly over the differences in professed political ideology--which could be based on greed, ambition, social and racial prejudice, or fear of turmoil and change, as well as on sincerely felt ideological beliefs. In the political jargon of the day, terms labeling the pro-government forces included Arevalistas, communists, the "official parties," and revolutionaries. Those who did not support Arévalo might be called conservatives, liberals, Falangists, cachurecos (members of the old pro-church Conservative Party), and reactionaries. During Arévalo's presidency, the most commonly used terms were "revolutionaries," i.e. Arevalista political parties (FPL, RN, PAR), and "reactionaries," i.e. those opposed to the government. An objective analysis of Guatemala's political differences, however, should employ a larger number of labels than revolutionary and reactionary.

Alfonso Solórzano has argued that at the end of Ubico's dictatorship, the long-dominant Liberal Party had divided into three wings, while remnants of the Conservative Party still existed. One wing of Liberals constituted the Ubico faction, another wing contained conservative, traditionally minded men who had been

outside or only on the margin of Ubico's favored group. The third wing, which Solórzano called "neoliberals," was made up largely of educated, middle-class people who desired reforms leading to democracy.<sup>22</sup> The remnants of the old Conservative Party, although no longer grouped in a political party of that name, had been enemies of Ubico but were traditionally minded and fearful of change.<sup>23</sup> The anti-Ubico Liberals and the Conservative remnants joined in opposition to Ubico, but only the "neo-Liberals" largely supported Arévalo for President. After the revolution, the problems between traditional Liberals and Conservatives meant little in the face of class conflict and the danger of uncontrolled change.<sup>24</sup>

Guatemalans who never desired Arévalo for President, and who refused (or were not allowed) to work in his government, constituted the original opposition of 1944 and 1945. Arévalo's opposition, however, did not remain static, for a significant number of revolutionaries who had supported Arévalo at first, or had at least accepted Arévalo's victory and were willing to give the new government a chance, would eventually become part of the opposition. The identification of various political groupings, however, cannot make clear the apparent mixing of disparate ideologies in certain individuals, or the tendency of some individuals to

straddle categories. Some outstanding personalities would fall between the cracks of any classification. The time factor is also difficult to elucidate, but it is important to remember that the opposition expanded continuously between 1945 and 1951.

In the main, the original opposition group represented the traditionally oriented, large landowners, the Church, and conservative elements in the armed forces. Some of them had signed their names to anti-Ubico petitions, and had joined political groups that voiced democratic ideas. Many, however, had joined the revolution with trepidation, or not at all, and all became worried when the young and the workers unleashed the power of Arevalismo. Arévalo's original opposition would include Manuel Cobos Batres, from a traditional landowner family linked to the old Conservative Party. Cobos Batres, born in 1878, had fought against ex-Presidents Estrada Cabrera, Orellana, Ubico, and finally, Arévalo and Arbenz.<sup>25</sup> Guillermo Flores Avendaño, a conservative ex-army colonel who finished fourth in the 1944 presidential elections, was a member of the "generation of 1920" (b. 1898), had signed the famous "311" petition asking for Ubico's resignation, and had advocated reform for the urban and rural workers. He would suffer jail and exile under Arévalo, and he would

be second in command of the "Liberation" forces that ousted Arbenz in 1954.

Arévalo's opposition, as noted above, continued to grow as some who at first had supported or accepted his government lost faith. Those who dropped out of the government coalition continued to identify themselves with the ideals of the revolution, only arguing that Arévalo's policies had opened the nation to communist infiltration. As explained by David Vela, editor of the conservative El Imparcial: "We did not know" that the civic movement of 1944 contained a nationalist tint in the "political style of Mao-Tsé-Tung."<sup>26</sup> By 1949, those revolutionaries who desired reform at a slower or more controlled pace had left the pro-government forces, and formed part of the opposition.

Eugenio Silva Peña was one such outstanding revolutionary who dropped out of the Arévalo camp. One of the "generation of 1920" (b. 1896), he had continued with an active political career since 1920, and played an important role in Ubico's downfall. He served on the 1945 Constituent Assembly, and was minister without portfolio under the Junta. In 1947, he resigned his position as minister of foreign relations because of disagreements with Arévalo's foreign policy, especially

Arévalo's decision to break relations with the dictatorships in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.<sup>27</sup>

Arévalo's most prolific critic in the "drop-out" category would be Clemente Marroquín Rojas, founder and editor of La Hora. Originally a candidate for President in 1944, Marroquín had admitted failure before the elections, and committed himself and his followers to Arévalo. The alliance seemed natural enough, since in 1944 La Hora appeared to be sincerely revolutionary, proposing national integration of the Indian and other changes. Soon, however, Marroquín developed a fear of Marxist trends in government. He warned in 1946 that Marxism is an "octopus which sucks the life out of the worker with more cruelty and harshness than the traditional landowner." Mexico, he claimed, had not embraced Marxism, but had "magnificent laws" to protect the workers. Unfortunately in Guatemala, "The youngsters of PAR, just babes in woods on political matters, have unwittingly fallen under the Marxist spell, and will be used in the Marxist game."<sup>28</sup> Marroquín claimed that he had to give up the post of Minister of Agriculture because Arévalo had bonded himself to a leftist ideology that he "little understood."<sup>29</sup> Marroquín and La Hora would be Arévalo's constant critics; Marroquín himself entered the Congress on an opposition ticket in 1949.

Not only older revolutionaries dropped out of the Arévalo government. Mario Efraín Nájera Farfán, just 20 years old in October, 1944, came from the well-to-do landowning class and had been a founder of RN. He served the Arévalo government in various capacities, including high positions in the Ministerio de Hacienda and the Ministerio de Gobierno. After 1947, he would work for Arévalo no more, and eventually he would serve Castillo Armas.

The majority of the revolutionaries who remained pro-government, including Arévalo himself, fit in the moderate leftist category, championing a new Guatemala but neither Marxism nor unfettered expectations. Manuel Galich expressed attitudes common to this group when he warned against extremism and against those who harbored an "impatience for progress." Education, he claimed, "would solve the worst of Guatemala's problems."<sup>30</sup> In a like manner, the FPL newspaper, El Libertador, cautioned against expectations of immediate transformation, and in one article of January 9, 1945, for example, claimed that even a revolution cannot make a total change in society overnight.<sup>31</sup> These moderate leftists shared some of the fears of the opposition, in the belief that too much reform too quickly might bring about civil disorder and economic turmoil, or even lead to communism. They

did not wish the masses to get out of control and generate a revolution of their own. Examples of this group were Oscar Barrios Castillo, Oscar Benítez, Raúl Osequeda, and Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela. The far left, many of whom were attracted to various degrees of Marxism, continued to support Arévalo, but always demanded more rapid and more comprehensive changes and a greater political role for the masses. Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, Enrique Muñoz Meany, Manuel Pinto Usaga, and José Manuel Fortuny would be examples of this group.

The two great issues of the Arévalo period, labor reform and land reform (explained in Chapter 6), became very visible cruxes during the breakdown of revolutionary unity. In the words of Manuel Galich, the issue of the labor code "created the meridian" that divided the political left from the political right: those in favor, those opposed. All had been Revolutionaries, in the main, "until one day before."<sup>32</sup> The issue of land reform also quickened the breakdown of unity, ultimately prompting Jacobo Arbenz in 1952 to declare that "Agrarian Reform has drawn the classic line in the sand: on one side those who are definitely with the Revolution and on the other side those who are definitely against the Revolution."<sup>33</sup> In fact, the process of revolutionary breakdown occurred steadily, under both Arévalo and

Arbenz, with each of the two reforms causing great conflict and disunity in the overall Guatemalan polity.

In sum, the Revolutionaries of 1944 soon had to contend with their serious differences. The initial revolutionary unity soon broke apart, mainly into two large camps composed of pro- and anti-government forces, but also into a myriad of smaller factions. The political record and the ideological viewpoints of the individual participants are not always clear, as personal ambitions, and revolutionary "drop outs" tend to confuse the picture. Viperous accusations and condemnations, produced in great number and hurled in all directions, further cloud the reality.

Who, then, were the "good guys" and the "bad guys"? Who deserves the blame for the breakdown of revolutionary unity? The position of each group was clear: the "other side" deserved the blame. El Imparcial, in an editorial of 1950, summed up the opposition view. Demagogues had broken the hitherto good relations between labor and management, which had been bringing steady improvement for the workers, with the bosses' blessing. Campesinos and workers came to believe only forced social reform would succeed. The government had fallen in line with these demagogues, and anyone who did not agree with the demagogues was a "reactionary."

The government forces operated with threats, insults, discriminations, which led to conflict, turmoil, and violence. If the government had been reasonable and fair, "all the internal problems would have been resolved easily and the current situation would be different."<sup>34</sup> On their part, the groups that remained loyal to the government simply claimed that their adversaries could not be trusted to voluntarily accept any significant reforms, and they blamed the new and old opposition for constant intrigues that aimed to slow down or destroy the reform movement.

Jorge García Granados, with apparent justification, castigated both the opposition and the government. In a 1946 interview, García stated that both sides lacked "generosity and tolerance," and "when the government stumbles or commits an error, no matter how small, the opposition exaggerates that error," while "the government itself abounds with men of thin skin, those who accept absolutely no criticism."<sup>35</sup> García's criticism contained much truth, although he ignored the fact that both sides defended deeply felt points of view, on matters of tremendous importance for the future of Guatemala. In any case, and in spite of the disunity and political turmoil, most Guatemalans believed that the current political reality was immensely better than under

Ubico. Only a few would have agreed with Ubico himself, who was currently living in luxurious exile, with his dog "Indio," and continuing to expound on his favorite theme: "Only I can govern Guatemala."<sup>33</sup>

#### Notes

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CHAPTER 8  
AREVALISTAS VS. THE OPPOSITION,  
1945-1949

Between 1945 and 1949, as the reformers advanced on their path to transform the economic and social structure of Guatemala, the forces of conservatism grew larger and more organized. Two significant characteristics of the conflict between the government and opposition stand out: one, the conflict would be, from the beginning, bitter, intransigent, and often violent; and, two, the size of the opposition, and the intensity of it, would increase over time. These years demonstrated little desire for compromise as violence and the threat of violence continued to characterize political events. The government and the opposition both blamed each other for first precipitating the malice and fury that marked Arévalo's presidency. Many of the political events during the Arévalo period, however, remain tainted with mystery because of the many conflicting accusations, the large numbers of rumors, lies, exaggerations, secret agreements and pacts. In fact, the "first shot" had been fired long ago, before the time of Ubico, and the firing had never stopped. The

revolution of October 20, and the Arévalo era, were the continuation of Guatemala's long struggle to discard the colonial past. The tradition of authoritarianism, in growing conflict with the developing tradition of reform and modernization, had spawned an intense conflict that allowed for little recognition of legitimate rule, except that rule which sustained itself by power.

The Arevalistas often called those who opposed the government "reactionaries." In its strongest sense, "reactionaries" indicated the groups and individuals who "reacted" to the Arévalo reform movement with intrigue and violence, in an effort to throw out the Arevalistas and regain a style of government closer to the Ubico standard. But the term "reactionary" became commonly used to depict all of Arévalo's opposition, even if such opposition eschewed violence, or simply wanted a halt to reform (rather than a return to Ubico), or agreed to continued reform but insisted on gradual implementation. As already noted, Arévalo's principal opposition included many of the great landowners and the wealthy class in general, the Church hierarchy, and some conservative members of the military. The United States should also be considered a part of the extreme opposition, but the U.S. role in Guatemala will be treated in Chapters 11 and 14. Eventually, many of the revolutionaries who dropped out

of the Arévalo camp and joined the opposition would also be termed "reactionaries," even though they continued to advocate reforms. It would be a mistake, of course, to consider the opposition a united, monolithic force.

The opposition would never achieve a strong solidarity, for the various groups had a variety of aims, tactics, and leaders. Political organizations often remained for only a short duration. Opposition groups by 1948, however, would become somewhat larger and better organized.<sup>1</sup> In 1948, wealthy landowners and business leaders founded three anti-Arévalo groups: the Liga Democrática Guatemalteca Contra el Comunismo, the Asociación Cívica Anti-Comunista, and the Unión Nacional Electoral. A United States intelligence report of 1950 noted that available information on these groups was "far too sketchy to permit an evaluation of their strength, influence, or relationship,"<sup>2</sup> but it is unlikely they had a large membership; they certainly had very little popular appeal. One of the more successful opposition parties, the Unión Cívica, which represented both staunch conservatives and disillusioned moderates, claimed a 20,000 membership;<sup>3</sup> most likely an inflated number. Also in 1948, two management organizations, the Cámara de Comercio y Industria (CCI) and the Asociación General de Agricultores (AGA) became at least nominally allied. The

AGA represented conservative landowners, and the CCI, which consisted of the Cámara de Comercio and the Asociación General de Industrias (AGI), endeavored to guard the interests of Guatemalan industry. In July 1949, in preparation for the upcoming Presidential elections, several opposition parties, including the Partido Unificación Anticomunista (PUA) and Unión Patriótica (UP), joined in the Bloque Político de Oposición. However, the opposition parties all together failed to attract a large following, and could not elect more than about 20% of the total congressmen during the Arévalo period.

Part of the wealthy landowning and business class found a measure of unity with the Falange Española en Guatemala, the Guatemalan arm of the Spanish Falange. The Falange was prohibited legal status under Arévalo, but continued to be an influence among the opposition. While compiling a list of possible enemies, Arévalo's police found that over 100 persons had given money to the Falange in 1938 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> According to Rafael Delgado, about 1000 Spaniards lived in Guatemala, 600 of whom were Falangistas.<sup>5</sup>

The Church, meaning primarily the upper hierarchy, and about 120 priests, remained closely allied with the wealthy opposition and the Falange.<sup>6</sup> Led by Archbishop

Mariano Rossell Arellano, appointed to his office on the recommendation of Jorge Ubico, the Church actively worked to undermine the Arévalo regime. The laws of Guatemala prohibited Church participation in politics, but the Arévalo government's occasional weak efforts to silence Church criticism met with little success. The official Church publication Verbum, founded in 1942, immediately adopted a solid pro-Franco stance,<sup>7</sup> and after the revolution bitterly opposed the Arévalo government. Acción Social Cristiana, a semi-official Church political weekly published from 1945 by Church supporters, "was devoted to advancing the position and prestige of the Church and to defending the economic status quo."<sup>8</sup> The first issue bemoaned the plight of the Church, and warned that world communism was spreading.<sup>9</sup> In February, 1945, the weekly claimed that a "dangerous beast" walked the streets of Guatemala, and that religious freedom was in peril.<sup>10</sup> Politics also became apart of the Sunday service, as the pulpit often served the clergy as a soap box from which to criticize the government. When ex-dictator Jorge Ubico died, the Archbishop conducted a very elaborate Requiem mass.<sup>11</sup> Considering that Ubico was the symbol of everything the Arevalistas fought to displace, a special mass at his death could be interpreted as a tacit protest against the Revolution.

The Church, however, commanded an uncertain degree of influence in Guatemala and the actual effect Church propaganda had in weakening or slowing the reform movement remains unknown. The vast riches once held by the Church had been lost during the nineteenth century, and by 1944 the Church had been reduced to a state of near poverty.<sup>12</sup> The hierarchy had little influence over the Indian population, and in the urban centers, generally only women were deeply affected by religion.<sup>13</sup> Church pressure on women voters may have been responsible for the election of the conservative candidate, Martín Prado Vélez, as the mayor of Guatemala City in 1949.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, the Church gave the opposition a rallying point based in the morality and tradition of religion; an important point by itself.

The forces of the opposition, in total, constituted a formidable obstacle to the Arévalo reform movement. The most recalcitrant elements had tried from the beginning to overthrow the Arévalo government; in fact, plots and coup attempts had been made against the Junta.<sup>15</sup> In 1945, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that Arévalo faced true danger.<sup>16</sup>

Estimates of attempted coups against Arévalo usually vary between 28 and 32, although Arévalo's enemies claimed that the government invented most of

them, as an excuse to eliminate political opponents. Ramón Blanco, of El Imparcial, claimed that during Arévalo's term, no more than five actual coup attempts were made.<sup>17</sup> Mario Monteforte Toledo believed there were 27 coup attempts, but that only four of them were serious enough to bring out both the army and the civilian Arevalista supporters.<sup>18</sup> One of the major abortive plots against the government ended on June 24, 1946, when the police arrested eighty to one hundred persons, including political party leaders and an ex-presidential candidate, Col. Guillermo Flores Avendaño.<sup>19</sup> The most serious event was the small civil war in July 1949, caused by the killing of the Chief of the Armed Forces.

Extremist civilian leaders of the opposition put most of their hope for a successful coup in the conservative elements of the armed forces, who were the only Guatemalans capable of defeating the Arévalo government by military force. The wealthy classes therefore used their power and influence to recruit military officers to the opposition cause. Military men, some of whom had been discharged after the fall of the dictatorship, often had leadership roles in opposition schemes and maneuvers, including ex-Col. Mariano Casado who failed in a coup attempt in December, 1948. The

opposition forces also beseeched the U.S. government to help. In the words of Arévalo, "They have pounded on the doors of the Department of State in Washington,"<sup>20</sup> although in fact all recorded contact found by this author took place at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala.<sup>21</sup>

The Arevalistas did everything in their power to counter the opposition, and thus continue their programs of reform. Arevalista response to the opposition was immediate. In April 1945, the government forced at least 22 men into exile including former presidential candidates Manuel María Herrera and Adrián Recinos; in June, 20 men. In July, Arévalo banned three opposition political parties.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the year, the Ministry of Government reported that 72 men in total had been sent into exile in 1945, which included exiles decreed by the Junta.<sup>23</sup> The Arévalo government often curbed constitutional guarantees in order to combat the opposition. A legal restriction of guarantees was made possible by Article 138 of the Constitution, which stipulated that the President must issue a decree, signed by the entire cabinet, to be approved by the Congress.<sup>24</sup> On April 9, 1945, Constitution Articles 25, 35, 37, 43, and 48 were suspended for 30 days, justified by coup attempts against the government. These articles had, among other things, prohibited exile, censorship of

private mail and papers, arbitrary entry of private domain, and arbitrary arrest. The government again suspended some constitutional guarantees for the months of October and November. Indeed, during approximately one-half of the total presidential period, i.e. three years, the Arévalo government put restrictions on constitutional guarantees.<sup>25</sup>

Also in 1945, Arévalo undertook some in-house cleaning, in a struggle to establish himself as the executive in charge.<sup>26</sup> His struggle would result in the elimination of some key conservative revolutionaries, and produce the first group of "drop outs" that would expand the forces of the opposition. Arévalo, of course, had from the beginning a strong base of power. Besides the powers of the presidential office, Arévalo had a Congress that was roughly 2/3 Arevalista, plus the largest and best organized of the political parties and unions which strongly backed the President, as did the Guatemalan electorate in general. But in March 1945, no one knew if the untried, inexperienced president would prove to be an effective head of state, or if he could overcome the strong influences of the ex-Junta members and other outstanding leaders of the Revolution.

The Arévalo administration, as set up in March, represented a compromise between the various political

forces. Arévalo's first cabinet, as had the cabinet under the Junta, consisted of moderate revolutionaries, leftist revolutionaries, and conservative revolutionaries. The leftists, in general, wanted far-reaching reforms implemented at a fast pace; the conservatives wanted only minor, well controlled reforms; and the moderates looked to long-term goals and reforms with gradual implementation. Adolfo Almengor, a political conservative, filled the post of minister of government. Enrique Muñoz Meany, a highly capable, respected, and sincere reformist of the political left, became minister of foreign relations. Manuel Noriega Morales, Guatemala's outstanding economist, a technocrat and largely apolitical, was named minister of economy. Rafael Pérez de León, a moderate and a technocrat, took the post of minister of communications and public works. Manuel Galich, a charismatic member of the FPL and a leftist, became minister of education. Dr. Julio Bianchi, an FPL moderate and one of the "generation of 1920," received the ministerial post of public health and social assistance. Roberto Guirola, a young member of the constitutional assembly, and a successful finca owner and operator, became minister of agriculture. Ex-Junta members Jorge Toriello and Jacobo Arbenz became, respectively, minister of finance and minister of

defense. The Supreme Court judges also represented a mix of political views.<sup>27</sup>

Arévalo's first in-house hurdle would be Jorge Toriello. As minister of finance, Jorge Toriello took a conservative stance, and he soon openly opposed the reformist intentions of the new president. As one observer described it, "from the very first, Arévalo and Toriello declared war."<sup>28</sup> Toriello established his own political party, the Partido de la Revolución, supported by a party newspaper named La Revolución. On May 16, 1945, the first issue of La Revolución called for an end to labor demands.<sup>29</sup> By August 1945 rumors grew that Jorge Toriello would soon attempt a coup against Arévalo.<sup>30</sup>

Jorge's ambition to destroy Arévalo gradually lost favor amongst even his fellow conservatives, who perceived in him an extreme personal desire for power. Many became offended by his extremist and hard-nosed attitudes, as did officials at the United States Embassy.<sup>31</sup> Toriello reportedly asked Chief of the Armed Forces Francisco Arana for help, but did not succeed in obtaining it. Without the military's backing, Toriello had little hope of success, and Arévalo obtained his resignation nearly a month later, on January 10, 1946. Arévalo would continue to name conservatives to his

cabinet, but none so dangerous as Jorge Toriello, who would remain after his resignation Arévalo's constant enemy.

Arévalo also succeeded in ousting Col. Miguel Angel Mendoza, chief of the national police, who had been an important member of the revolution, but was not fond of the leftists. Mendoza entangled himself in a scandal when a policeman beat up Minister of Education Manuel Galich, in August 1945. Supporters of the popular Galich strongly protested and accused the police chief of using his power to intimidate his enemies. As a result, Arévalo gained the grounds to force Mendoza's resignation in September. Arévalo was, after all, the supreme commander of the police chief, who worked for the minister of government. Arévalo thereafter approved only trusted Arevalistas for the police command, ensuring that the police would remain a constant source of power for the President. Mendoza joined the growing ranks of the opposition, and would be jailed in May 1948, for his participation in a plot against the government.

Under Arévalo, the structure of the national police became more elaborate, as the government tried to make the police force stronger, more efficient and modern. The force, which in early 1946 consisted of 2,355 national policemen,<sup>32</sup> had been divided into two

main organizations: the Guardia Civil and the Guardia Judicial, both of which were then divided into a number of sub-sections with particular duties. Within the Guardia Judicial, there existed the security police (Guardia de Seguridad), which was "absolutely secret," with the duties to investigate and arrest anyone dangerous to Guatemalan security. These officers would only identify themselves when making an arrest, and daily reports would be made to the Ministry of Government and the President.<sup>33</sup> The ministry did not want the post-revolution secret police confused with that of Ubico, which had been a hated instrument of the dictator's repression.<sup>34</sup> Arévalo's opposition, however, accused Arévalo's police of using similar, Ubico-style tactics, and they continued to call the police "ears," as had been done under Ubico, to signify the spying aspects of police duty. Some opponents of the government furthermore accused the government of physical mistreatment and even torture, including ice torture and electric shock,<sup>35</sup> although this author found no evidence or strong indications of police abuse of such magnitude.

Police archives for 1945 and 1946 record the arrests of dozens of citizens, charged with insulting or denigrating the government or the police. It remains unclear if they were subsequently convicted in court, and

it remains unclear if these arrests continued after 1946. Exact reasons for the arrests, as reported on the police forms, vary from case to case, but the following cases, taken from October, November, and December of 1945, are typical: October 15, drunk and saying bad things about the government; October 13, insulted the police; October 17, insulted the President and the government; October 18, insulted the President; October 22, lamented that the previous month's plot failed to overthrow the government, and said, among other things, "it is a lie that there is liberty in Guatemala"; November 4, insulted the President and said other untrue things; November 17, called the police "wretched ears"; November 19, insulted the police; December 19, a policeman had suddenly come across him, as he insulted the President with dirty words. <sup>36</sup>

The men arrested in the above cases apparently were common men, with no outstanding political importance. The arrests usually appear to have been spontaneous, and not the result of previous investigation, although this was not always the case: Dr. Miguel Angel Muñoz Ochoa, a prominent physician listed in Guatemala's "Who is Who" of 1944, was arrested only after he had criticized the government for several days.<sup>37</sup> Some have called such arrests "stupid doings" of the individual policemen.<sup>38</sup> And certainly many were not

arrested who criticized Arévalo and the government, in public and in the press.

The police watched, or "spied," on a great number of people, and their reports were sent to the minister of government and the President. In particular, the police watched men and women who had participated in subversion or rebellion, or seemed to show a likelihood of doing so in the future. In the summer of 1946, for example, the police carefully watched, and followed, Abraham Cabrera Cruz, Francisco Montenegro, Alejandro Arenales, and Adán Manrique Ríos, all of whom were important, and dangerous, political opponents of Arévalo.<sup>39</sup>

It was not uncommon, however, for the police to report on persons who only spoke ill of the government, or who had joined political parties of the opposition. Any show of pro-Ubico sentiment caused the government alarm. Once, the police reported that at a mass given for Jorge Ubico, the priest had been "very sentimental" during the sermon, "extolling" Ubico, and calling him "a true friend." The priest had said that "ears" were probably present, but he did not care.<sup>40</sup> Local police reported everything that might indicate the existence of government enemies. When the Juez de Paz and the Intendente of Morales, Izabal, argued in favor of Jorge Ubico, while drunk, they were reported by the sub-chief

of the Morales Guardia Civil, to the director of police. The director then reported the matter to the Ministry of Government.<sup>41</sup> People did, of course, occasionally complain about the "ears." A group of citizens of San Juan Ostuncalco complained to the government that the police always watched everyone, and asked that they be ordered to stop. Arévalo himself wrote "No!" on the margin of their request.<sup>42</sup>

Any government employee or public official not on the Arevalista bandwagon stood the possibility of losing his or her position. The Arévalo government, the Arevalista political parties, and pro-Arévalo citizens, all took an interest in eliminating real and potential political enemies from their jobs. In 1945, in the early months of the Arévalo presidency, investigative teams were already touring the country, listening to the people, asking questions, and finding the local officials and employees, high and low, who were inept, corrupt, or anti-Arévalo. At least some of these officials, and possibly all of them, were replaced.<sup>43</sup>

Quite often, the government relied on information sent by the local Arevalista parties, or by individual citizens. For example, in December of 1945, a group of Arevalistas from San Cristóbal Totonicapán sent the President a list of names of the men who had supported

Ubico and Ponce, and who still retained their positions in local government. The chief of the Guardia Civil in Totonicapán was instructed to investigate. One of the accused was a penitentiary guard, one a municipal secretary, another a city treasurer, and so on. Some had already lost their positions, including two school teachers, for their anti-Arévalo views. The archival sources consulted do not indicate if those still working were replaced.<sup>44</sup>

In May 1946, Arévalo received the testimony of the pro-Arévalo ex-guardalmacén fiscal of Quezaltenango, who claimed that he had been unjustly fired from his job, and replaced by a man who had been a founder of a pro-Ponce political party in Totonicapán. Arévalo directed that the information be sent to Julio César Méndez, the chief of PAR, "to order an investigation about the matter of Totonicapán." The PAR branch in Totonicapán concurred that, indeed, the man in question had been one of the principal founders of a branch of Partido Liberal, pro-Ponce, in Totonicapán, in 1944. The PAR report went on to list 16 other leaders of the Ponce group, claiming that the Poncistas were still outspoken enemies of the Arévalo government. Also, many of them still held offices in the local Totonicapán government, which, according to the PAR report, should not be allowed. The PAR

information, in turn, was sent to the Ministry of Government, under Arévalo's instructions, "para los efectos procedentes en el caso de los Poncistas empleados." The documents do not disclose the final fate of pro-Ponce workers, but Justo Armas, the pro-Arévalo guardalmacén fiscal who started the investigations with his testimony to the President, did obtain his old job back, plus an additional position as well.<sup>45</sup>

On September 17, 1946, in another typical case, a letter arrived at the President's office from the ex-treasurer of San Cristóbal, Totonicapán. The man charged that he had been dismissed from his job and replaced by an "enemy of the present government." The Guardia Judicial received notification from the President's office the same day, asking the police to investigate the matter. On September 24, the chief of the Guardia Judicial reported that the suspect had been employed during the whole regime of Ubico, had also supported Ponce, and "it was rumored" he had expressed "unfavorable" remarks about the Arévalo government, "but no one could firmly support it." The report further explained that the town council majority (all ladinos) had supported Ponce. The three Indian members of the council were Arevalistas, but because they were Indians "almost had neither voice nor vote in municipal

decisions." On September 25, "with instructions from the president," these documents were sent to the PAR headquarters, "in order to take note," with instructions to return the documents. On October 2, Mario Monteforte Toledo, secretary general of PAR, "having taken note," returned everything to the President. On October 5, Arévalo ordered the minister of government to replace the suspect treasurer with someone "worthy and with a clear record." The Ministry relayed this order to the governor of Totonicapán on October 10.<sup>46</sup>

In another facet of the conflict, newspapers, books, magazines, pamphlets, fliers, were all employed in a widespread war of words waged between the pro-government forces and the opposition. The government occasionally closed or censored the opposition periodicals, and hindered the dissemination of opposition viewpoints, but all during Arévalo's term a constant supply of extremely anti-government publications remained available to the public. In reply, both the government and the pro-government parties produced a plethora of their own publications. Discussion on both sides could be rational, and convincingly presented, but a good many attacks contained insult and evident malice.

Pro-government publications included, among others, Diario de Centro América, Mediodía, Diario de la

Mañana, and Acción. The Diario de Centro América, published by the government since 1931, contained two sections; one section to report official acts, new laws, etc., and the other section covering general news. (The official section ceased publication January 31, 1950, to be superseded by El Guatemalteco.) Mediodía, created by Arévalo and his staff and published by the Ministry of Government, had its first issue on May 15, 1945. Diario de la Mañana began publication in 1949, and joined Mediodía as an outspoken government defender. The opposition daily La Hora, for example, was accused by the Diario of representing "backward ideologies," "traitors" to the nation, and "cowards."<sup>47</sup> Marroquín Rojas, the owner and editor, was portrayed as having the "nature of soda water, that is, effervescent," producing tirades on the level of comic book characters. Also, in an affront with a machista ring, it was alleged that he could not stop talking any more successfully than some women.<sup>48</sup> The Diario likewise happily reported the words of Minister of Agriculture Guerra Morales, who claimed the quality of writing in the opposition newspaper El Imparcial remained on the level of cheap Western novels.<sup>49</sup> Acción, edited by the Escuela Normal Central para Varones, began publication in 1948, with a far left, Marxist, and anti-clerical slant. Acción, for example,

attacked the church with a cartoon that accused the clerics of serving imperialism, while saying "amen to Wall Street's acts of usurpation."<sup>50</sup>

Opposition publications included La Hora, El Imparcial, La Revolución, El Pueblo, and El Mundo Libre. The first two were both directed by outstanding members of the "generation of 1920," Marroquín Rojas and David Vela; both newspapers had contributed to Ubico's fall; and both continually criticized the Arévalo government. Ramón Blanco, a manager of El Imparcial, was exiled for several months in 1949, and again in 1950.<sup>51</sup> Both newspapers, between 1945 and 1951, published a large number of editorials that attacked the government and its young, zealous advocates. In a typical example of January 1946, El Imparcial complained that certain eager revolutionaries suffered from "juvenile self-love." Do they wish to construct a new Guatemala, asked El Imparcial? "No; this is secondary. They wish to destroy, blow off steam, squander our abundant life in sterile discussions, to satisfy vengeful feelings, to annihilate or try to annihilate all that does not unconditionally kneel before the new idols and the new despotisms that they are forming and feeding."<sup>52</sup>

La Revolución, on its part, promoted the political party of ex-Junta member Jorge Toriello. El Pueblo was

the party newspaper of the Partido del Pueblo, which from late 1949 denounced the government while it promoted the presidential candidacy of the "father of the Constitution," Jorge García Granados. The small and independently owned El Mundo Libre, however, surpassed all other newspapers in its damnations; and in falsehoods. Directed by José A. Miranda of the old Liberal Party, the newspaper began publishing in May 1949, and continued into the Arbenz presidency. Among other things, El Mundo falsely accused Arévalo of amassing great wealth, and of tyranny on the level of Estrada Cabrera.<sup>53</sup>

As already noted, opposition newspapers from time to time were suppressed or censored. In one case, a decree of May 20, 1946 suppressed all newspapers established after June 13, 1945--a provision that served to close two opposition papers, the Mercurio and La Verdad.<sup>54</sup> (Other opposition papers, however, were allowed to begin after the date of the decree.) The government claimed that Mercurio and La Verdad had abused the right of free expression, and that the government's literacy campaign needed paper. The opposition, of course, claimed the decree discriminatory. Mercurio later reopened, but its continued hard campaign against the government led to its forced closure again in 1947,

and the deportation of its editor-in-chief. Reopened in 1948, Mercurio resumed its attacks.<sup>55</sup>

The Arévalo government put further curbs on the free expression of opposition viewpoints with the Ley de Emisión del Pensamiento, passed by the Congress on April 24, 1947. The law was designed to curtail the slanderous criticism of public officials, and mandated fines or incarceration for the guilty. Arévalo strongly approved of this law, for it would protect "the reputations of honorable persons."<sup>56</sup> In a newspaper article of January 1947, he explained that liberty of speech and liberty of opinion must be allowed in matters such as religion, politics, philosophy, morality, art, and science; but liberty of speech and opinion must not allow malicious slander. Malicious statements to be prohibited would include "Pablo doesn't like Pedro; Pedro doesn't please him; or he is afraid of Pedro, or he 'thinks' Pedro is a driveling fool, or a thief; or that María is a low class washerwoman, or a prostitute, or that she stinks, or snores when she sleeps, etc." Arévalo called these types of thoughts "psychological," and he proclaimed that "this type of psychological thought cannot be emitted freely."<sup>57</sup> The Ley de Emisión would punish those who did not "respect popularly elected functionaries," and make it "each day more impossible for unpopular rulers to come

back into power."<sup>58</sup> "The parrots of dictatorship," said Arévalo, "cannot stick their beaks in the waters of the new political society that was born in October."<sup>59</sup> It is not clear, however, to what extent this law was consistently applied; and certainly it did not stop public criticism of the Arévalo government.

As a further response to opposition attacks, and operating under a budget approved by Congress, the Departamento de Publicidad of the office of the President aided a large number of activities that promoted the ideals of the revolution and pro-government sentiment, and combated the allegations of the opposition. Over a two-month period in 1946, for example, publicity expenses included the following: on November 5, four hundred Quetzales paid to the Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios; and, "to finance in part, the expenses needed to advance the Revolution," one thousand Quetzales were paid to the Confederación de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CTG), and five hundred to Federación Sindical de Guatemala (FSG). On November 6, 290 Quetzales went to Arévalo's general secretary, "for pro-Revolutionary expenses," 500 Quetzales went to the Sindicato de Acción y Mejoramiento Ferrocarrilero, and 200 Quetzales went to Abelardo Estrada to help with the pro-government newspaper El Popular. On December 2, Q3000 was paid by

Publicidad to the President's general secretary, for "confidential" expenses, of a pro-government nature. Similarly, on December 2, the Guatemalan Embassy in Mexico received Q3,500.00, for "confidential" expenses in favor of the Arévalo Government. The President's general secretary received another Q1,000.00 on December 21, Q1,300.00 on January 3, 1947, and Q2,000.00 on January 7.<sup>60</sup> From the government's standpoint, these were expenses in "education," and formed part of an overall policy to fortify the public with the truth as perceived by the Arévalo administration, and to combat the plots and lies of the opposition.

The Arévalo administration, and the Arevalista Congress and political parties, had countered the opposition with strong determination. The opposition, because of its own divisiveness, and the power of the government, never succeeded to stop the Arevalista reform movement. But as will be made more clear in succeeding chapters, the opposition forces would remain a constant and profound threat; substantially undermining the goals of the revolution.

Notes

1. NAUS 814.00/6-2248 no.319; NAUS, State Department Papers, Office of Intelligence Research, Oct. 23, 1950, OIR Report 5123, 76-77.

2. NAUS OIR 5123, 76.

3. Ibid.

4. Jefe de la Guardia Judicial to Arévalo, August 12, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

5. Rafael Delgado, Falange en Guatemala (Mexico, 1948), 75. For a summary of the Falange in Guatemala, see Frankel, "Political Development," 182-191.

6. The number 120 comes from Holleran, Church, 235.

7. Frankel, "Political Development," 190.

8. Ibid., 192.

9. Acción Social Cristiana, Jan. 11, 1945.

10. Ibid., Feb. 8, 1945.

11. Holleran, Church, 210.

12. Ibid., 60.

13. Ibid., 223; Suslow, "Social Reforms," 123.

14. NAUS OIR 5123, 73.

15. NAUS 814.00/2-945.

16. NAUS 814.00B/8-3145.

17. "Galera," El Imparcial, Nov. 4, 1959.

18. Monteforte Toledo, La Revolución, 16.

19. NAUS 814.00/6-2646; 814.00/7-146 No.1501.

20. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 406.

21. NAUS 814.00/2-945; 814.00/6-1445.

22. Copia de acuerdo, July 10, 1945, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

23. Memoria de Ministerio de Gobernación, March 1, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios, 52-54.

24. Silvert, A Study in Government, 16.

25. Ibid.

26. La Hora, Sept. 13, 1972.

27. Congress decree number 48 includes the names of the judges. The Supreme Court under Arévalo played a much less dynamic role in the polity than the Congress.

28. Ramón Blanco, "Galera," EL Imparcial, March 27, 1956.

29. NAUS 814.00/6-545 no.131.

30. NAUS 814.00/8-1545.

31. NAUS 814.00/4-2445.

32. Memoria de Ministerio de Gobernacion, p.52, March 1, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernacion, Varios.

33. Reglamento de la Guardia Judicial, June 13, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía; Documento no. 787, July 27, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

34. Ibid.

35. La Hora, May 17, 1958; Ibid., Feb. 27, 1963. In his column "Galera," Elly Rodríguez González gives a long list of people allegedly exiled, tortured, and killed under Arévalo.

36. Jefe de la Guardia Judicial to Ministro de Gobernación, Oct., Nov., Dec., 1945, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

37. Memorandum al Señor Presidente, Nov. 2, 1945, AGC, Dirección General de Policía; J. Víctor Soto de Avila, Quién es Quién: diccionario biográfico centroamericano (Guatemala, 1944), 387.

38. Jorge Arriola, interview with author, Guatemala City, June 20, 1987; Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 15, 1987. Direct quote belongs to Arriola.

39. Movimiento observado a las personas que fueron vigilados--, June, August, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

40. No.4028, July 19, 1946, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

41. No.2502, Dec. 19, 1945, AGC, Dirección General de Policía.

42. Subsecretario de Gobernación to Arévalo, May 9, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios.

43. Secretario General de la Presidencia, June 4, 7, 1945, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República; Sociedad de Empleados Municipales al Señor Secretario Privado de la Presidencia, Dec. 21, 1945, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

44. Registro de Correspondencia, no.6619 (and attached documents), Dec. 7, 1945, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

45. Audiencia de 10 de mayo de 1946 (and attached documents), May 10, 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

46. No.4436, clasificación 131 (and attached documents), Sept. 17, 1946, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

47. "La Hora, diario oficial de la antinacionalidad," Diario de la Mañana, Oct. 7, 1949, p.1.

48. "Buenos días, Don Clemente," Diario de la Mañana, Oct. 8., 1949, p.1.

49. Diario de la Mañana, Jan. 14., p.1.

50. Acción, Sept. 1949, p.6.

51. El Imparcial, April 8, 1975.

52. El Imparcial, Jan. 9., 1946, p.1.

53. El Mundo Libre, Jan. 5., 1951; and May 25, 1951, p.1.

54. NAUS 814.00/5-2246 no.1396.

55. NAUS OIR 5123, 75.

56. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 394.

57. Ibid., 180-181.

58. Ibid., 191.

59. Ibid., 190.

60. Departamento de Publicidad, Feb. 21, 1947, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

CHAPTER 9  
AREVALISMO: UNITY AND DISUNITY,  
1945-1949

As noted in chapter 7, the revolutionary forces that overthrew Ubico and Ponce failed to remain united, and splintered into a general divide of anti-government (opposition) and pro-government (Arevalista) groups. The Arevalistas themselves suffered from serious conflict, created by ideological differences and by points of self-interest, such as competition for public posts and for influence over the electorate. Ex-President of Congress Mario Monteforte Toledo, in a statement that exaggerated but contained truth, stated that the Arevalista parties suffered from conflict "more rancorous than between the reformers and the opposition."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Arevalistas remained united in most of the general, long term goals that included human rights, modernization, and democracy. The successes they achieved in the social, economic and political spheres attest to the measure of unity they retained. But by 1949, disagreements and disunity were leading to a conflict that would profoundly and irrevocably alter the

character of Arevalista parties and Guatemalan political reality as a whole.

In general, the same personal and ideological forces that caused the breakdown of revolutionary unity also caused internal conflict for those groups that remained within the Arevalista camp. Although all of the Arevalistas championed labor and land reform, they did not always agree on the desired speed of change, or the exact nature of the reforms. In essence, the Arevalistas themselves were divided into leftists, moderates, and conservatives, although taken as a group they clearly remained to the political left of the opposition.

Marxist participation in the reform movement became a major source of conflict. Monteforte Toledo, a moderate FPL member, went so far as to claim that only one ideological difference divided the Arevalistas: "the participation of the communists in the movement."<sup>2</sup> Communism in Guatemala had grown in the 1920s, but had been smashed under the dictatorship. In 1944, a small number of communists took part in the revolution and the formation of the Arévalo government, but they cautiously remained silent about their beliefs, realizing that communism was highly unpopular.<sup>3</sup> Communists, however, became increasingly influential in the following years, and, as already stated, a source of conflict.

In 1945, the Arevalistas tried to overcome their political differences by forming one, inclusive political party. On October 17, Frente Popular Libertador (FPL) and Partido Renovación Nacional (RN) combined to form the Unión Revolucionaria, and on November 24, they changed the name to Partido Acción Revolucionaria (PAR) when the Partido Social Democrático joined the merger. On November 18, 1946, the PAR national convention produced a manifesto of principles designed to be broad enough to insure the agreement of all factions. The program called for the transformation of Guatemala's society, politics, economy and spirit. It also demanded international peace, economic sovereignty, Central American unity, suppression of latifundium, protection of private property, free organization of labor, social improvements and education of the masses.<sup>4</sup> In essence, the manifesto voiced all of the hopes and goals of the revolution. But beyond these broad objectives, the leaders of the previously independent parties within PAR "could not reach mutual understanding nor work in harmony."<sup>5</sup>

In 1947, the intra-PAR conflict reached the breaking point. In February, moderate reformers including Julio Méndez Montenegro demanded the ouster of PAR's Secretary General, José Manuel Fortuny, who was a far leftist and a future leading Marxist.<sup>6</sup> When leftist PAR

extremists allegedly led a group of workers in a violent attack on a peaceful anti-labor demonstration in March, PAR moderates and conservatives became particularly incensed. In May significant numbers of non-leftists resigned, protesting that radical PAR labor leaders were "rabble rousers."<sup>7</sup> PAR moderates and conservatives re-established the Frente Popular Libertador (FPL), under the leadership of Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela. The members of FPL did not oppose profound reform, but openly abhorred what they called extremism. The FPL party manifesto declared support for Arévalo, advancement of labor rights and working conditions, and agricultural reform after careful study. The manifesto also spoke out against communism.<sup>8</sup> Another faction of the PAR split off to regroup the Partido Renovación Nacional (RN). The RN, under Secretary General Carlos Acevedo, a personal friend of Arévalo,<sup>9</sup> continued to act largely in accord with the remnants of PAR. Not a large party, RN had fewer members in the Congress than FPL or PAR. After the split, PAR, RN, FPL, continued to be the three largest parties which supported the Arévalo government, but no longer did so as a united front.

Within the PAR, the communists formed another faction, and in September 1947, they established an underground organization called the Vanguardia

Democrática Guatemalteca (VDG).<sup>10</sup> As communists were not allowed by the government to establish their own party, they worked under the aegis of the PAR. Important members of the PAR who were also members of the VDG included Carlos Manuel Pellecer, once editor of the PAR newspaper El Libertador; and the PAR Secretary General José Fortuny. Other notable PAR-VDG members were Victor Manuel Gutiérrez, Bernardo Alvarado Monzón, Alfonso Guerra Borges, Mario Silva Jonama, and Luis Cardoza y Aragón.

The relative conservatism of FPL, seen through the eyes of the far leftists, was manifested in a petition sent to Arévalo in July 1947, signed by members of the Comité Salvadoreño de Liberación Nacional, the Frente Revolucionario Hondureño, and the Comité Patriótico Nicaraguense. These committees represented Central Americans of the political left who lived in Guatemala. The petition claimed that the FPL served Yankee imperialism, violated the Constitution, and pursued dictatorial policies that made a farce of the October 20 revolution. Also, if the FPL disagreed with someone, the FPL would accuse him of communism. The FPL was said to have drawn up a list of workers and professionals that it so accused, and was trying to have expelled. The signers of the petition had faith, however, that Arévalo would

protect them. They had, after all, fought side by side with the Guatemalans to free the working classes.<sup>11</sup>

Fortuny, Secretary General of PAR, explained his view of the differences in a private letter to Julio Estrada de la Hoz, on September 4, 1947. In the letter Fortuny called FPL members Manuel Galich, the Méndez brothers, Alfonso Bauer Paiz and others "populists." Populists, he wrote, believe that revolutionary movements are enacted from the top elements of society and not from the masses. They underestimate the knowledge and ability of the rural masses. He called FPL "petty bourgeois without doctrinaire direction," afraid of the "hollow threats" of imperialism and the advance of the Guatemalan people.<sup>12</sup> PAR, implied Fortuny, believed in the potential of the common people to lead their own revolution. An anonymous PAR member, during a party meeting, advanced another reason why moderates did not champion the people. Moderates, he said, did not desire close contact with farmers and laborers, who "smell like goats because they work."<sup>13</sup>

After the breakup of PAR, the FPL became the strongest of the Arevalista parties. The FPL held a majority of lower level government offices and nearly a two-thirds majority in congress. FPL power in Congress caused PAR and Labor many moments of anguish, for example

in October 1947, when FPL sided with the conservative Minister of Government, Francisco Villagrán. The minister had issued a circular to local governments which ordered the officials to stop labor "agitators" who promised land to workers and Indians. Labor and PAR protested that the order would restrict unionization.<sup>14</sup>

In 1945 and 1946, President Arévalo's stand on the inter-party conflict had remained in doubt for some observers, although Arévalo's public speeches and promises to the people continuously suggested a leftist posture. In his May Day speech of 1946, for example, he publicly criticized former leaders who had given the "blood and soul of Guatemala" to foreign interests. He then called for the liberation of wealth from the rich.<sup>15</sup> In his visits around the country, Arévalo promised water, electricity, schools, roads, jobs, and, according to one observer, "all that the people would ask for."<sup>16</sup>

But many actions taken by the Arévalo government demonstrated a measured approach to reform. In January of 1946, Arévalo ordered closed the far leftist labor school Escuela Claridad, on grounds that it taught an international doctrine, which violated article thirty-two of the constitution. Arévalo also slowed his promises to labor when serious labor disputes proliferated at the end of 1946. The Army, with Arévalo's approval, forcefully

put down some labor strikes, and in January 1947, the government declared a "no strike" policy until officials enacted a pending labor code. Andrew E. Donovan, 1st Secretary of the U.S. Embassy, declared that Arévalo's "present course" was "more to the right than to the left."<sup>17</sup>

Arévalo had from his first cabinet named conservatives, moderates, and leftists, and in 1947 the Arévalo cabinet retained a rough balance. Eugenio Silva Peña of the conservative Frente Nacional Revolucionario (FNR) headed the Foreign Ministry. Francisco Villagrán, another conservative, served as Minister of Government. FPL held three cabinet posts: Health, Economy, and Education. RN men led the Ministries of Finance and Communication. PAR headed Agriculture. The Minister of Defense, Jacobo Arbenz, though officially apolitical, favored the PAR. In sum, Arbenz and the PAR and RN members totaled four leftists. Moderates numbered three and conservatives two.

Some observers accused Arévalo of weakness, and saw in him an inability to stand firm on reform issues. He "rarely seemed to have a mind of his own," claimed 1st secretary Donovan.<sup>18</sup> Arévalo commented on his alleged lack of forcefulness during an interview with a journalist of Nuestro Diario. "An ideal country is that

in which the official passes unnoticed and what stands out are the institutions." This is, he said, the mark of highly civilized nations such as the United States. He claimed not to care what the critics said about his lack of forcefulness, as his actions were in Guatemala's best interests.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Arévalo feared instability, and he remained adamantly opposed to communism. In a speech read over the radio in September of 1947, Arévalo spoke out strongly against communism and the recent formation of Vanguardia, an unofficial organization that did not publicly proclaim its Marxism, but whose members' extreme left inclinations were obvious. This "communist" party, said Arévalo, is "dangerous" and "fundamentally anti-democratic." Arévalo described in some detail the evils and shortcomings of communism in general, and in Russia. "Communism as a doctrine remains innocuous, but the communists as a political force are already dangerous in Europe and a shadow over the future of the American continent."<sup>20</sup> The communists were also denounced by the president of congress, Mario Monteforte Toledo, a member of FPL. Soon after these condemnations, fifteen alleged communists were deported to Mexico, for several months.

Arévalo nevertheless remained strongly committed to reform, and by the end of 1947 he proved that his true sympathies lay primarily with the leftist demands for change. When Silva Peña resigned on July 30, in protest against leftism in government, Arévalo appointed the prominent leftist Enrique Muñoz Meany as new Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Arévalo named PAR leader Augusto Charnaud McDonald to replace the FPL member in the Ministry of Economy and Labor.<sup>22</sup> During August, leftists (not communists) thus held six cabinet positions while moderates and conservatives were reduced to two and one respectively. Villagrán, the last conservative in the cabinet, resigned in disgust shortly thereafter and an FPL member took his place. In November, Arévalo vetoed a bill passed by the FPL majority that might have slowed down labor advances. The bill, according to the U.S. Embassy, had been controversial enough to cause fist fights and a near gun fight in congress.<sup>23</sup> The Embassy claimed that Arévalo's sympathy for the PAR and the RN had become "taken for granted."<sup>24</sup>

At the end of 1947, the revolutionaries in government had become polarized. At one end, the moderates of the FPL held much sway in congress, with nearly a two-thirds majority. On the other hand, the

leftists had great influence in the administration, and counted on the President as an ally. José Manuel Fortuny felt optimistic about the future. In a letter to Alvaro Hugo Salguero, dated September 4, 1947, Fortuny predicted the ultimate defeat of the moderates. He wrote that "the populists hide themselves in congress in a state of expectancy, nervous, restless, without knowing whence or at what hour their vanquishers will come."<sup>25</sup>

In March, 1948, the political duel between the divided Arevalistas reached a new peak, but ended in somewhat of a draw. Arévalo removed the last FPL member from his cabinet, and went on to weed out FPL members who served as sub-secretaries and in other official positions.<sup>26</sup> In a public interview, he said he dismissed FPL members from his government because they had been working against him.<sup>27</sup> When FPL members in congress threatened to obstruct the budget, Arévalo backed down slightly and named FPL member Alfonso Bauer Paiz to the key position of Minister of Economy and Labor.<sup>28</sup>

In preparation for the congressional elections of December 1948, political leaders of the three Arevalista parties tried to curb their bitter disagreements, leading PAR and RN, which had combined in a loose union called the Victory Bloc, to make a non-aggression pact with FPL. But efforts at inter-party reconciliation were not

successful. The last months of 1948 witnessed a high level of pre-election strife, so much so that election day had to be postponed. When the election finally took place, vote fraud apparently occurred on all sides, and many results were disputed. When the final results were determined in April 1949, FPL received twenty-eight seats, the Victory Block twenty-five, and the opposition parties fourteen. The FPL had lost some of its former strength, and the opposition had gained.

FPL, in spite of its problems with the other Arevalista parties and with Arévalo himself, remained pro-government, and continued to support the general goals of the reform movement. With most members of the FPL, Arévalo remained popular and highly respected. Like Arévalo, they abhorred communism and feared that unbridled reform could create dangerous instability, a milieu where communism could grow. The "seventeen principles" of the FPL, published in 1949, claimed continued adherence to revolutionary goals, including final eradication of the traditional political parties (the Liberals and the Conservatives), free organization of the workers, democratic agrarian reform and an end to latifundios. As usual, the FPL manifesto also proclaimed itself against communism.<sup>29</sup>

Disunity had also developed within the particular membership of each party. By 1949, internal discord centered on splits between factions which advocated no compromise with the other Arevalista parties, and factions more committed to inter-party unity. In the FPL, in April 1949, those members who advocated inter-party harmony gained control of the executive committee, and elected Manuel Galich as Secretary General. Those led by Mario Méndez Montenegro, who were unwilling to work with PAR and RN, had been defeated.<sup>30</sup> PAR members experienced a similar crisis in early 1949. José Fortuny, with other far leftists and communists, championed an uncompromising position against the FPL. Fortuny's group favored a full commitment to the radical demands of labor. The new Secretary General of PAR, Roberto Alvarado Fuentes, headed a faction that desired better relations with FPL. The struggle emerged in the open at the PAR national convention in March over which faction would lead the executive committee. Alvarado's group, led by Charnaud McDonald, proved to be the most numerous and mustered 382 votes, whereas Fortuny produced only 120.<sup>31</sup>

Important members of the labor leadership did not approve of the Alvarado faction's willingness to work with moderates. In May 1949 the most influential labor

leader, CNUS and FSG Secretary General Manuel Pinto Usaga, expressed unhappiness with the FPL in a letter to Alvarado dated May 6, and praised a small bloc of deputies that he identified as the Bloque Obrero de Diputados; Pinto threatened to change labor's political tactics, but gave no specific details.<sup>32</sup> Alvarado explained PAR's position in a reply to Pinto dated May 16. He agreed that elements of FPL had not treated labor well, but stated that the FPL had at least been interested in dealing with reforms. PAR, he said, had a pact of democratic collaboration with FPL, through which they hoped to deal successfully with the problems of the nation even though the hard-liners of the labor movement said it was "absurd and childish" to form alliances with such elements as the FPL. Alvarado expressed unhappiness that a labor bloc might form independently from the PAR, and warned that such tactics might place the revolution in danger.<sup>33</sup>

Pinto's counter-reply on May 18 refrained from the strong language of the first letter, but he did not show a change of heart. He agreed with the need for revolutionary unity between PAR, RN, and labor, but not FPL. He did not mention again his threat to change labor tactics, but apparently remained unhappy with the PAR leadership.<sup>34</sup>

While disunity grew more serious for the Arevalista parties, organized labor succeeded to become larger, stronger, and more cohesive. As noted in chapter 6, by 1950 there were more than 150 unions, with nearly 100,000 members. There existed at times strong conflict within and between the various unions, which weakened the overall labor movement. In the words of one labor leader, Arcadio Ruiz Franco, "The ideological enemy of the working class is the capitalist extortionist, but the enemy who is more real and palpable within the organizations of the workers, is the calumnies, gossip and the insidiousness of all humanity, provoked by envy and egoism."<sup>35</sup> But labor would largely rise above this divisiveness, and "by 1949 the labor movement stood as the strongest and best organized popular group supporting the administration."<sup>36</sup>

Efforts to overcome conflict between the unions occurred early. On December 19, 1944, the major unions established Guatemala's first labor confederation, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CTG), but in November 1945 ten of the thirty-one affiliated unions withdrew in protest over the Marxist propaganda school, the Escuela Claridad. The school had been established in July, 1945, within the CTG organization, and the school leadership, as a body, had been given one vote on the CTG

executive committee. Antonio Obando Sánchez, the first head of Escuela Claridad and a long time Marxist, had spent 13 years in jail under Ubico. Ostensibly an adult education school for union members, it mainly taught Marxist doctrine. The CTG executive committee debated the school's existence on November 4, 1945: 15 unions voted that Claridad should remain in the CTG, 13 unions voted no, 3 abstained. Accusing the CTG of communist inclinations, ten unions founded a rival confederation, the Federación Sindical de Guatemala (FSG).<sup>37</sup> The FSG remained the largest labor organization, with its strength based upon urban labor, while the CTG received its major impetus from the teachers union, the Sociedad de Trabajadores en Educación en Guatemala (STEG). The FSG initially proved somewhat less impatient for social and economic changes, and resolved to oppose communism, which had become an influential force in the CTG.<sup>38</sup>

PAR, however, helped to bring the two labor federations back together. After the split in January 1946, FSG had tried to promote its own candidates for Congress without help from the political parties, while CTG worked closely with PAR. When the FSG failed to do well, it accepted an invitation by PAR to begin talks, and soon thereafter both FSG and CTG were cooperating with PAR.<sup>39</sup> The federations also received the help and

advice of a number of foreigners, including the Cuban communist Blas Roca, with the design of uniting the labor movement.<sup>40</sup>

In December 1946, the FSG, CTG, and one smaller and less significant federation, the Federación Regional Central de Trabajadores (FRCT), formed a loose union named the Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical (CNUS). CNUS actively voiced labor demands and guarded against inter-union clashes. It also helped develop political committees designed to advance labor's political goals and to support candidates for political office.<sup>41</sup> As political activity by unions had been banned in the Provisional Labor Law of March 1946, the committees claimed to be independent of the unions, although in practice, little had been done to enforce the provision.

With the formation of CNUS, the confidence and power of organized labor grew. Labor leaders retained close ties to PAR-RN, but they increasingly became independent of the political parties. In the words of José Cardoza, "We workers obtained by sheer exertion our greatest social and economic conquests," and it was a "daily fight" to obtain justice, by court room battles, strikes, and armed defense.<sup>42</sup> The workers sometimes earned their advances in spite of the politicians. Still, Arévalo himself greatly helped organized labor through

his application of the labor code of May 1947. The labor code provided measures to control the unions, establishing strict regulations over internal union affairs and membership; moreover, strikes could be undertaken only after procedures of conciliation and arbitration failed. A strict application of the code would thus have weakened organized labor, but Arévalo chose to emphasize those provisions of the code of benefit to labor.<sup>43</sup>

By mid-1949, communists as individuals and Marxism as an ideology had become highly influential in organized labor. This was less true of the FSG than CTG, but in fact the differences between the two were minor. In a dispatch of June 30, 1949, the U.S. Embassy noted that FSG international policies had become, especially during the previous six months, increasingly similar to those of CTG. Both organizations supported the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL), and at the time the Embassy dispatch was being written, the Secretary General of CNUS and FSG, Manuel Pinto Usaga, and the Secretary General of CTG, Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, were both en route to a World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) meeting at Milan.<sup>44</sup>

As the workers movement solidified and grew more powerful, and Marxism refused to go away, the Arevalista

political parties had divided into factions. On the whole, the Arevalista split reflected a general divide by 1949, between those who championed more rapid and vigorous change of social and economic structures, often accepting Marxist influences; and those who took a gradualist approach and sought to minimize or eliminate Marxist influence.

Notes

1. Monteforte Toledo, La Revolución, 16.
2. Ibid.
3. José Fortuny, "Testimonio," in Carlos Cáceres, Aproximación a Guatemala (Guatemala, 1980), 141.
4. Declaración de principios, Nov. 18, 1946, LCMD/GD, PAR-Box 7.
5. Samayoa Chinchilla, El quetzal, 106; NAUS 814.00/1-845 no.1956.
6. NAUS 814.00/2-747 AGM.
7. NAUS 814.00/7-3147 Tele; 814.00/6-347 no.2490.
8. La Hora, June 13, 1947, p.2.
9. NAUS 814.00/10-247 Memo.
10. Carlos Manuel Pellecer, "Respuesta al cuestionario de Alan V. LeBaron a C.M. Pellecer," Houston, January 16, 1978, p.3; Ronald M. Schneider, Communism in Guatemala: 1944-1954 (New York, 1958), 57.

11. "Memorial dirigido por las emigraciones Centroamericanos al Presidente de la República de Guatemala," July 21, 1947, AGC, Correspondencia del Presidente de la República.

12. José Fortuny to Julio Estrada de la Hoz, Sept. 4, 1947, LCMD/GD, PAR-Box 7.

13. Antecedentes, 1947, LCMD/GD, PAR-Box 7.

14. NAUS 814.00/10-247 Memo.

15. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 310-311.

16. Nájera, Estafadores, 81-82; NAUS 814.00/1-247 Memo.

17. NAUS 814.00/1-247; 814.00/1-247 Memo.

18. Ibid.

19. Nuestro Diario, March 8, 1947, p.1; NAUS 814.20/3-2547. Arévalo did not invent this doctrine for the 1947 political situation; he had fully developed it in the 1937 article "Istmania." See: Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 6-21.

20. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 411-414.

21. According to article 137 of the constitution, the President could appoint and remove ministers at will. He could only be checked with a two-thirds vote in congress.

22. A United States Embassy report called Charnaud "leftist" and "irresponsible." Written in pencil on the dispatch document was "a bad egg." NAUS 814.00/10-247 Memo.

23. NAUS 814.00/11-2847 ARG.

24. Ibid; 814.00/3-1948 no.144.

25. José Fortuny to Julio Estrada de la Hoz, Sept. 4, 1947, LCMD/GD, PAR-Box 7.

26. NAUS 814.00/3-1948 no.144.

27. NAUS 814.00/4-2748 no.203.

28. NAUS 814.00/3-1948 no.144.

29. Publicaciones del Frente Popular Libertador, "El partido: sus principios fundamentales" (Guatemala, 1949).

30. NAUS 814.00/4-549 no.179.

31. NAUS 814.00/3-2249 no.152.

32. CNUS to PAR, May 6, 1949, LCMD/GD, CPNT-Box 15.

33. CNUS to PAR, May 16, 1949, LCMD/GD, CPNT-Box 15.

34. CNUS to PAR, May 18, 1949, LCMD/GD, CPNT-Box 15.

35. Arcadio Ruiz Franco, Hambre y miseria (Guatemala, 1950)

36. Bush, "Organized Labor," iii.

37. Bishop, "Guatemalan Labor," 16-25; NAUS OIR 5123, 14-17.

38. Schneider, Communism, 130.

39. Bishop, "Guatemalan Labor," 112.

40. Ibid., 42.

41. NAUS OIR 5123, 17.

42. José Cardoza, "A treinta años de la revolución de octubre de 1944," Alero (Guatemala), 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), 91.

43. Bush, "Organized Labor," part 4, pp.65-66.

44. NAUS 711.14/6-3049.

CHAPTER 10  
THE MILITARY AND THE ARANA-ARBENZ FEUD,  
1945-1949

The armed forces had long defended the Guatemalan status quo, but in October 1944, the military majority gave its crucially important help to the forces of the revolution. From that time, the military became "heroes of the people," and in official propaganda remained so until the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954. The military had become a strong and well organized institution by 1944, and after the revolution it continued to modernize, organize, acquire greater economic benefits, and become largely autonomous.<sup>1</sup> It remained a key power in Guatemalan politics.

Military leaders claimed that they had no desire to rule or control the government, but only wished for reasonable salaries, a chance to modernize, and freedom from civilian manipulation.<sup>2</sup> As a typical editorial of Revista Militar claimed, "The army is from and for the people. The army today and tomorrow will be loyal to the laws of the country and never again to one individual"<sup>3</sup> The military officers, however, continued to retain

strong political views, and in spite of the middle and lower class origins of most of them, the majority remained inclined toward moderate conservatism.<sup>4</sup> Many of the officers, including Francisco Arana, had firmly committed themselves to the overthrow of Ponce only in the last few weeks before the revolution.<sup>5</sup> According to Kalman Silvert, the political parties initially distrusted the democratic intentions of both Arana and Arbenz.<sup>6</sup> In testimony of civilian uneasiness, article 154 of the Constitution mandated the Chief of the Armed Forces to swear an annual oath, which began with the words: "We swear that the armed forces never will be an instrument of arbitrariness nor of oppression," and ended with the words: "we will maintain the Army as a professional institution, worthy and absolutely apolitical." Although some officers would remain firmly committed to the goals of the revolution, a large segment of the military became unhappy with trends of reform under Arévalo. Overall, the military acted as a strong moderating influence on Arévalo and the leftists.<sup>7</sup>

During Arévalo's term in office, the military became split into two main factions, one group led by the Chief of the Armed Forces, Col. Francisco Arana, and the other group led by the Minister of Defense, Col. Jacobo Arbenz. Both Arana and Arbenz wanted to be President in

1951, and the nature of the split in the military centered on the ideals and political ambitions of these two men. Arana remained dominant until his death in 1949. As Chief of the Armed Forces he was the military's most powerful commander, in control of armaments, installations, and appointments, and he also retained the loyalty of the large majority of officers.<sup>8</sup>

Some observers have believed that the Arbenz and Arana split was influenced by a traditional animosity between graduates of the military academy and the "line officers" promoted from the ranks.<sup>9</sup> Arbenz had graduated from the academy, Arana had not. Certainly, school graduates often maintained some prejudice against the less educated officers of the line, who often came from a rural and Indian background.<sup>10</sup> On one occasion, Julio Bonilla, a leader of the FPL, told a representative of the U.S. Embassy that line officers were "uncultured."<sup>11</sup> Col. Rodolfo Mendoza claimed that line officers feared being discriminated against.<sup>12</sup> Arana tried to control this conflict. In February 1945, he promised there would be equality and security of rank for all. He also recommended that graduates remove their school insignias in order to demonstrate commitment to Army equality, and he encouraged line officers to attend school.<sup>13</sup> However, it has not been demonstrated that

this traditional animosity greatly influenced the Arbenz-Arana conflict. Some of the most ardent Aranistas were school graduates, including Col. Jorge Barrios Solares, Col. Albert Bone Solís and Col. Juan Francisco Chajón. "The friction between the officers of the line and those of the school has more fame than profundity," Arbenz said in 1968.<sup>14</sup>

A division between the younger and older officers may have become a more important factor in the Arbenz-Arana split. Younger officers more often championed Arbenz. "Young Military" was the phrase used by contemporaries to identify the Arbenz faction. For example, Istmania called Carlos Paz Tejada "one of the young military," Carlos Díaz "a young military," and José Angel Sánchez "a member of the youngest of today's army."<sup>15</sup> But there were significant exceptions. Many officers of opposing groups shared nearly the same age, including Col. Jorge Barrios Solares of the Arana camp and Col. Carlos Aldana Sandoval of the Arbenz faction. Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, an Aranista, was slightly younger than Arbenz. Arana himself was only about 7 years older than Arbenz.

Arana desired the presidency from an early date, possibly from the time he first experienced executive power as a member of the Junta. In December, 1945, an

automobile accident seriously injured President Arévalo. In these difficult times, while Arévalo lay in the hospital and the violent opposition tried to take advantage of the situation, Arana, Arévalo, and a group of political leaders entered into the secret "pacto de la barranca." The pact promised support to Arana in the next presidential elections if Arana guaranteed the continuation of the Arévalo presidency until its legal end, in March 1951.<sup>16</sup> Arévalo completely recovered in the early months of 1946, and according to an Arana supporter, Arana's personal desire to become president steadily increased after 1946.<sup>17</sup>

Arana came from a simple, rural background, had first entered the Army as an enlisted man, and had become an officer and a leader by his outstanding natural abilities. Often described as a calm and modest man, who could also be amiable and jovial, he was considered well read and admirably self-educated by those who knew him.<sup>18</sup> He remained humble about his abilities, and retained some habits of speech that revealed his uneducated, rural origins.<sup>19</sup> Arana's political views, in relation to the extremes in Guatemalan politics, remained moderate. He counted among his most loyal civilian supporters Mario Méndez Montenegro, who in 1944 had been an FPL founder but from 1947 began distancing himself from the more

extreme leftist leaders.<sup>20</sup> Clemente Marroquín Rojas of LA Hora, a dedicated reformer but an opponent of Arévalo, also supported Arana.<sup>21</sup> Other important civilians loyal to Arana were Juan José Orozco Posadas, Oscar Benítez Bone, and Julio César Méndez Montenegro, all three of whom belonged to the Arevalista parties. Orozco Posadas and Benítez were especially strong supporters of Arévalo. Arana appealed to people who wanted to continue the democratic principles of the revolution, but who wanted a strong president to control the demands of the masses and halt the growth of Marxism. The arch-conservatives sometimes saw Arana as their best hope, but generally considered him a weak opponent of communists and leftists.<sup>22</sup> The leftists were Arana's harshest critics. They habitually labeled him as reactionary and opportunistic. Pellecer thought Arana "tried to obstruct all social and economic progress in the country."<sup>23</sup> Jorge Arriola said that Arana "did not understand the ideals of the revolution."<sup>24</sup> In his own defense, Arana claimed that he was for the ideals of the revolution and stability, and placed himself "left of moderate." He claimed to be "not extremist, nor of the right."<sup>25</sup>

In 1948, Col. Francisco Arana began to seek the presidency openly; while never officially declaring his

candidacy. Among the three Arevalista parties, only in the FPL did Arana have significant support, but FPL party members were divided. By late 1948 the majority of the FPL leadership had decided to endorse one of their own members for the presidency. In November of 1948, FPL congressmen joined PAR and RN congressmen in passing a resolution which protested Army political activities in the 1948 congressional campaigns. The resolution ostensibly meant to remind the Army to remain apolitical, but close observers felt it was an attempt to dim Arana's presidential hopes.<sup>26</sup> A minority of FPL members still strongly favored Arana for president, and they organized pro-Arana groups throughout Guatemala.<sup>27</sup> Mundo Libre identified one such group, led by FPL member Hector España in Chiquimula.<sup>28</sup> Arana encouraged this movement, helping establish the Partido Social Revolucionario to further advance his candidacy.<sup>29</sup>

Arbenz also wanted to be President. The son of a Swiss immigrant and a ladino mother, Arbenz excelled at academics and sports. His distinguished work at the military academy Escuela Politécnica earned him promotions equaled only by six other cadets in the academy's history.<sup>30</sup> After graduation, he taught physics, chemistry, the art of war, and history at the academy. Arbenz became an enemy of the dictators earlier

than Arana, and he spent some time in exile before the revolution.<sup>31</sup>

Arbenz came to lead those officers who were commonly called "the young military," designating a progressive, often idealistic group; in the main young graduates of the military academy. Although they numbered only about 10% of the officers, their influence exceeded the size of their group, because of Arbenz's presence in the cabinet and their good relations with other young Arevalistas. When Arevalista newspapers and politicians referred to the heroic new revolutionary military, they spoke in general to include the entire military institution, but most often they praised in particular the "Young Military," the phrase used by contemporaries to identify the Arbenz faction. The CTG, for example, claimed an alliance with the "Young and Democratic Soldiers."<sup>32</sup>

PAR, RN, and organized labor came to champion Arbenz to become the next president, a decision probably made early but only slowly made public. The Guatemalan ambassador to Mexico, Juan Córdova Cerna, claimed that since about 1947 rumors surfaced saying that at election time the FPL would support Arana and that the PAR would go with Arbenz.<sup>33</sup> Schneider found that at least as early

as September 1948, PAR leaders and most labor leaders had agreed on Arbenz for president.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the fact that Arbenz had PAR and labor support, he claimed to the United States Embassy that he was a non-leftist. In 1944, in private conversation with United States Ambassador Boaz Long, he warned that Mexican leftists might help organize Guatemalan unions. If labor ruled, he said, the United States stood to lose its investments. According to Boaz Long, Arbenz hoped "that something might be thought out whereby we would be sympathetic when those in control of affairs in Guatemala (presumably to include Arbenz) sought to liberate themselves from the skillful impositions" of labor organizers.<sup>35</sup> In effect, Arbenz had asked for aid to combat leftism if needed. In April of 1945, Arbenz said he opposed sending military officers to Mexico for he abhorred the leftist Mexican influence. Instead he wanted to organize the entire Guatemalan Army along the lines of that of the United States.<sup>36</sup> Arbenz would continue his overtures to the United States while an active presidential candidate in 1949 and 1950, as will be seen in chapter twelve.

Arbenz may have misrepresented himself to the Embassy, but truly his lifestyle did not reflect a leftist ideology or a special concern for the masses. On

August 18, 1947, the Guatemalan property registry recorded the sale of the large finca "El Cajón" to Jacobo Arbenz for 125,000 dollars.<sup>37</sup> El Cajón, located in the rich farm area of Esquintla, stretched over 3,898 manzanas. A close business associate of Arbenz, Minor Keilhauer, owned a 5,470-manzana farm called "Los Cerritos."<sup>38</sup> Nuestro Diario claimed that these fincas, El Cajón and Los Cerritos, were two of the best in Central America.<sup>39</sup> Other Arbenz cronies had large landholdings, for the most part recently acquired. Because of their involvement in cotton production, Jaime Díaz called this group "the new cotton bourgeoisie."<sup>40</sup> Some Arbenz supporters had reputations as anti-leftists and anti-communists, including Carlos Aldana and Victor Sandoval.<sup>41</sup>

In essence, Arbenz was a progressive nationalist and a capitalist. He wanted Guatemala to be a modern capitalist country: he himself claimed to be not a "spiritual socialist, nor a socialist of any other type."<sup>42</sup> Like most Guatemalans, Arbenz was also an economic nationalist. In 1946, an official of the U.S. Embassy witnessed a revealing reaction from Arbenz at one of Guatemala's nightclubs. Once, as the music started, a man asked Mrs. Arbenz to dance. As she headed for the floor, Arbenz "partly rose from the table and said that

he would be damned if he would let his wife dance with the United Fruit Company." The U.S. official asked who the man was, and Arbenz admitted he did know his name, but that he worked for the United Fruit Company. Arbenz said "he did not like his wife even to be seen in the company of "'those people.'"<sup>43</sup>

Arbenz, in a 1949 private conversation with Ambassador Patterson would speak for a long time, "with obvious sincerity and clarity of language," about the economic, social, and democratic goals of the revolution. Arbenz complained about landowners who blocked reform, and said that a decent wage must be paid to agricultural workers, although he was careful to add, "there is no intention to discriminate against foreign firms, and there is no desire on the part of the Arévalo administration to communize the country."<sup>44</sup> Friends of Arbenz demonstrated similar reformist and modernizing tendencies. For example, Minor Kelhauer allowed his workers on Los Cerritos a modern union and a chance to buy land. Kelhauer also had a large experiment underway to make paper pulp from plant products.<sup>45</sup>

Arbenz shared common interests with leftists in such areas as labor and agrarian reform and he proved willing to work with them. "Almost from the start of the revolution," wrote Pellecer, "Arbenz was a friend, or

friendly, with those of us who would later be leading Communists."<sup>46</sup> But he was neither a Marxist, nor just an idealist. He wished to modernize and enrich Guatemala, and as capitalists everywhere, planned to enrich himself along the way. "Arbenz had ideas, not ideology," claimed Pellecer.<sup>47</sup>

The U.S. Embassy officials, whose dispatch reports often suggest a personal dislike for him, considered Arbenz to be an ambitious opportunist.<sup>48</sup> They thought that while he presented himself as a foe of leftism, he in fact meant to prime the United States in order to receive substantial aid, for himself and for Guatemala. Certainly, Arbenz did seek the favor of the United States, to help insure a continuation of U.S. investment, aid, and capital loans which he knew Guatemala needed. But, as a progressive interested in Guatemala's future, Arbenz was more than an ambitious opportunist. Also, in addition to a desire for aid, Arbenz probably tried to sweet-talk Embassy officials because he agreed with the first rule of the ex-Guatemalan dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera: to stay in power one should never fall out of favor with the United States.<sup>49</sup>

The division in the military thus largely corresponded to the division in civilian politics. The

officers led by Arbenz shared common goals with the civilian progressives and leftists, and the officers under Arana allied with the civilian moderates and conservatives. The "pacto de la barranca" and the desires to be President demonstrated the continuing involvement of the military in politics. Meanwhile, with Arana remaining the most powerful military leader, the reform movement had a strong moderating hand which helped hold back leftist advances.

Notes

1. American University, Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Guatemala 1944-1954 (Washington D.C., 1964), 82; Frankel, "Political Development," 122, 131, 134.
2. NAUS 814.002/3-1745 no.2271.
3. "El nuevo ejército," Revista Militar, 3:4 (March and April 1945), 6-7.
4. NAUS 814.00/2-945; 814.00/3-945 no.2237; 814.00/6-545 no.131.
5. Silvert, A Study in Government, 8.
6. Ibid., 10.
7. NAUS 814.00/6-745 no.386; 814.00/6-845 no.153; 814.00/6-1445; 814.00/6-1845 Memo; 814.00/7-1345 no.37.
8. Marta Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," Alero, 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1974), 119, 121; American University, Studies, 5.

9. See for example: Clemente Marroquín Rojas, "Dejo de existir el coronel Saturnino Barrera," La Hora, May 18, 1976; Frankel, "Political Development," 124.

10. Monteforte Toledo, Monografía, 360.

11. NAUS 814.00/3-945 no.2237.

12. Ibid.

13. NAUS 814.20/2-1945 no.2155.

14. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 121.

15. "Nuevo gabinete," Istmania, March 24, 1951, 6-9. All three became prominent members of the Arbenz administration.

16. Nájera, Estafadores, 106; Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, My War with Communism (New Jersey, 1963), 225; NAUS 814.00/1-1647; Manuel Galich, Réplica a García Granados (Guatemala, 1950), 18; Ramon Blanco, "Galera," El Imparcial, March 27, 1956; Schneider, Communism, 28; Oscar Barrios Castillo, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 14, 1987; Francisco Villagrán Kramer, "Los pactos," Prensa Libre Domingo, July 5, 1987, p.11. Exactly who attended the secret meeting, and what was agreed upon, remains controversial. According to Villagrán Kramer, the pact (which was never made public) was written on a page in a notebook and now lies in the archives of Carlos Paz Tejada, in Mexico.

17. Nájera, Estafadores, 106.

18. NAUS 814.002/3-1745 no.2271; Alvaro Contreras Vélez, "Cacto," Prensa Libre, Feb. 23, 1984; Oscar Barrios Castillo, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 14, 1987; Marco Antonio Villamar Contreras, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 17, 1987; Oscar Benítez Bone, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 1, 1987.

19. Clemente Marroquín Rojas, "Me piden terciar en cierta discordia," La Hora, August 19, 1976.

20. El Imparcial, Jan. 18, 1958. Méndez would become an outstanding politician again after 1954, in a political climate that would make him appear to the left of the mainstream--although his views remained essentially unchanged. The same could be said for his brother, Julio César (President of Guatemala 1966-1970), who had also supported Francisco Arana.

21. Manuel María Avila Ayala, "El Col. Arana murió de muerte natural," Nuestro Diario, August 2, 1949, p.3.

22. Ydígoras Fuentes, My War, 226; NAUS 814.00/2-747 AGM; 814.00/6-349 no.267.

23. Pellecer, "Respuesta," 1.

24. Jorge Arriola, interview with author, Guatemala City, June 27, 1986.

25. Nuestro Diario, June 19, 1949.

26. NAUS 814.00/11-1048.

27. Nájera, Estafadores, 107.

28. Mundo Libre, Jan. 21, 1950.

29. Schneider, Communism, 29.

30. El Imparcial, Jan. 27, 1971. See also: Francisco Armando Samayoa Coronado, La Escuela Politécnica a través de su historia, vol.2 (Guatemala, 1964), 127, 343.

31. Curriculum del Coronel Jacobo Arbenz G., LCMD/GD, Armed Forces and Defense-Box 1.

32. "Manifesto del Comité de Acción Política de la clase trabajadora," LCMD/GD, CAP-Box 15. For an example of revolutionary enthusiasm from a young army captain who idealized the role of Guatemalan youth--military and civilian--see Jorge Medina Coronado, "¡Llegó la hora!," Revista Militar, (March-April 1945), 3.

33. Istmania, June 19, 1950, 7.

34. Schneider, Communism, 134.

35. NAUS 814.00/12-1644 no.1886.
36. NAUS 814.00/4-2445.
37. Registro de Inmuebles, Guatemala, Finca 3443, Folio 76, Libro 40 de E.
38. "Nómina de Fincas," LCMD/GD, President's Folders--Box 4.
39. Nuestro Diario, August 3, 1949, p.6.
40. Jaime Diaz Rozotto, El carácter de la revolución Guatemalteca: ocaso de la revolución democrática-burguesa corriente (Mexico, 1958), 231.
41. NAUS 814.00/7846 no.1529; OIR 5123, 72.
42. "Respuestas al cuestionario," LCMD/GD, President's Folders--Box 4. Also see: Celhelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 116.
43. NAUS 814.00/8-146 Memo.
44. NAUS 711.14/8-1249 no.435.
45. Suslow, "Social Reforms," 89.
46. Pellecer, "Respuesta," 3.
47. Ibid.
48. NAUS 814.00/10-2644 CSMAH; 814.00/8-146; 814.00/7-2949 Memo.
49. Chester Lloyd Jones, Guatemala: Past and Present (Minnesota, 1940), 68.

CHAPTER 11  
THE USA AND GUATEMALA,  
1945-1949

Two obstacles that troubled the reform movement have already been described: the conflict and disunity within the pro-government forces; and the tactics of the opposition groups. The United States government and U.S. companies, working in tandem to protect their perceived interests, would constitute a third obstacle. United States policy in Guatemala was based on a defense of U.S. business interests, and on the elimination of communism and "near-communism," even though U.S. companies often worked contrary to the just needs of the Guatemalans, and communism (in Guatemala) remained a minor threat to United States interests.

Initially, official governmental relations between the United States and post-revolution Guatemala were cordial. During State Department deliberations after the fall of Ponce, some officials worried that the Arevalista movement might eventually run counter to U.S. interests, but majority opinion held that the new government would remain friendly and not threaten U.S. interests.<sup>1</sup> The legal status of the triumvirate government was recognized

after a few weeks. In fact, many United States officials demonstrated sympathy with Guatemala's hope to win freedom and democracy, and well they should have, for it was obvious that the revolutionaries looked to the United States for the style of democracy they wished to develop in Guatemala. Guatemalan newspapers in general depicted the United States as a world democratic leader. The first post-revolution government, the triumvirate Junta, consisted of two members of the historically conservative military, and the third man represented the conservative landowners class. Boaz Long, the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala since March 1943, reported that steps taken by the Junta appeared "quite moderate and middle of the road."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the actions of the Junta had been popular, and seemed in the best interests of the nation, providing "a basis for the assertion that it was a most 'democratic' revolution."<sup>3</sup>

Initial reports on Juan José Arévalo appeared favorable. Arévalo, although he spoke against foreign economic domination, praised the United States for its high level of democracy and its role in World War II.<sup>4</sup> The United States Embassy in Argentina investigated Arévalo's Argentine record, and found him "satisfactory from a United States viewpoint."<sup>5</sup> John F. Griffiths, an

officer at the embassy and a "close friend and confidant of Dr. Arévalo", wrote:

I am so sure of Arévalo's honesty, sincerity and intelligence that I feel bound to surmise that if, as president of his country, he places obstacles in the way of friendly and cooperative relations with the United States it will be because of real disillusionment or because of circumstance beyond his control.

Boaz Long believed that Juan José Arévalo was a sincere educator, concerned for the Indians and poor ladinos, but he thought Arévalo would be a cautious and not a radical president; a president who realized "progress will undoubtedly be painfully slow."<sup>7</sup> The ambassador further believed that a need for capital and technology would influence the Guatemalan government to overlook laws made to protect economic sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Although much enthusiasm had been expressed by the revolutionaries, the Embassy expected them to move in a "conventional way" toward democratic government.<sup>9</sup> The Embassy, however, did perceive a number of potential enemies to United States interests. These individuals they watched carefully. FBI reports made in early 1945 reflected a fear that communists might try to establish a base in Guatemala.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of their attraction to a U.S. style democracy, many Guatemalans made a clear distinction between the democratic government enjoyed by U.S.

citizens, and the imperialist actions of U.S. owned businesses in Guatemala. Not unusual was the January 13, 1945, issue of El Libertador, which criticized International Railways of Central America (IRCA) for its connections to Ubico and its fight against "the just demands" of the workers.<sup>11</sup> The newly formed unions made wide use of labor strikes, and U.S. owned companies were affected earlier than most Guatemalan companies. In January 1946, the railway union Sindicato Acción y Mejoramiento Ferrocarrilero (SAMF) wrote a letter to the manager of IRCA, declaring "we will not tolerate more despotism on your part."<sup>12</sup> SAMF proved to be an extremely aggressive union, and caused IRCA many difficulties.<sup>13</sup> Much of the criticism directed to foreign companies came from political leftists, but critics included moderates and conservatives, among them Manuel Cobos Batres, a strong Catholic and far right conservative, who in 1945 published handbills that condemned U.S. imperialism and political intervention in Guatemala.<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. companies, the largest being United Fruit Company (UFCO), International Railways of Central America, Empresa Eléctrica, and Pan American World Airways, had become an integral part of the Guatemalan economic status quo. When the reformist revolution

swept Guatemala, UFCO and other U.S. companies joined the opposition in an all-out effort to halt change and secure a continuation of the benefits of the past. All of them faced serious labor difficulties under Arévalo. United States citizens had invested 90 to 100 million dollars in Guatemala by 1944,<sup>15</sup> and Ubico had "granted so many monopolies that, by the time of the 1944 revolution, United States companies virtually dictated Guatemala's economic life."<sup>16</sup> U.S. companies dominated land transportation, shipping and port facilities, airways, electric power, and communications. United Fruit (which also owned a controlling interest in IRCA) monopolized the banana trade and a majority of the production, and also monopolized Guatemala's shipping and port facilities.

The United Fruit also used corrupt tactics in order to make excessive profits. For example, in order to escape taxes and accrue larger profits, UFCO juggled its books.<sup>17</sup> In fact, UFCO paid almost no taxes at all and overcharged its Guatemalan transportation customers.<sup>18</sup> The Guatemalan Minister of Economy and Labor, Alfonso Bauer Paiz, figured that UFCO earned about 10 million dollars a year more than its yearly expenditures. The profits stayed in the United States and did not return, which resulted in a net loss for Guatemala.<sup>19</sup>

Guatemalan reformers saw the U.S. companies and the U.S. government as part of the same imperialist camp. Ambassador Boaz Long, who had cultivated chummy relations with Ubico and the wealthy landowners, had won for himself deep-seated animosity. Jacobo Arbenz admitted to an embassy official in 1946 that he had hated Boaz Long.<sup>20</sup> President Arévalo had only contempt for Long, who with other previous ambassadors had been the "instrument of American companies."<sup>21</sup>

Edwin J. Kyle, an agriculturist and educator who became ambassador in February 1945, managed to be more popular, as he demonstrated a true respect for Guatemala.<sup>22</sup> President Arévalo expressed great admiration for Kyle, and said that "Ambassador Kyle was the first really decent diplomat that the United States had had in Guatemala."<sup>23</sup> Kyle, in return, held Arévalo in high esteem.<sup>24</sup> Kyle claimed that he used the embassy's influence to promote stability and democracy,<sup>25</sup> and one incident that shows his attitude is documented. During Arévalo's row with Jorge Toriello in 1945, the United States quietly gave the president support. Kyle instructed U.S. Chiefs of Military and Military Aviation Missions to "unofficially" comment to Guatemalan military officers that U.S. did not favor Arévalo's overthrow. Violent or unconstitutional actions, they were instructed

to say, might hinder further military aid co-operation.<sup>26</sup> U.S. officials thought this maneuver would curb Francisco Arana if he decided to stop protecting the new government and join Jorge Toriello. What effect, if any, this warning had on Arana is not known, although he did not, of course, join Toriello.

In 1946, despite the obvious potential for increased conflict, and the enmity between reformers and U.S. business, official relations between the two nations remained cordial. Arévalo himself remained in good favor with the United States. In November, Rodolfo Rivera, the United States Cultural Attaché, called President Arévalo "definitely friendly to the U.S. and inspired by the democratic principles to which he would like to adhere."<sup>27</sup> But the United States of course continued to exhibit concern over the actions of leftist politicians and labor leaders. For example, the Embassy thought (wrongly) that Jorge García Granados (the ex-President of the Constitutional Assembly) was a far leftist who might favor expropriation of IRCA with inadequate compensation.<sup>28</sup>

In January of 1947, the U.S. Embassy noted that much of labor had become angry at Arévalo, for using army troops to break up strikes, and declaring all strikes illegal until Congress passed a labor code. The Embassy

thought that the Arévalo government would continue to steer a middle ground political course, believing that Arévalo would not last long in office if he tried otherwise.<sup>29</sup> As the year progressed, however, with the passage of the Labor Code, the increasing growth and radicalization of the labor unions, and the increasing leftist nature of the Arévalo government (see chapter 9) governmental relations between the U.S.A. and Guatemala would become increasingly bad.

May 1, 1947, the day of promulgation for the Labor Code, marks a watershed event in US-Guatemalan relations. UFCO, with U.S. government backing, would become a leading opponent of the new code. The company claimed that some of the provisions, especially article 13 and article 243, directly discriminated against foreign companies. Article 13 set limits on the numbers of foreign employees that could work in Guatemala, while article 243 permitted, among other things, harvesttime strikes against companies with 500 or more agricultural workers; and against companies which operated in more than one department or economic area and employed 1000 or more workers. UFCO representatives were especially angry over article 243, for they claimed that only U.S. companies had such a high number of employees; a claim disputed by the Guatemalan government.<sup>30</sup> The company

warned that the labor code would weaken Guatemala's economy, and openly speculated on the cutting back of UFCO's operations.<sup>31</sup>

The U.S. government would quickly become allied to the U.S. companies' point of view, and 1947 would thus become a year of worsening governmental relations between the United States and Guatemala. In May 1947, U.S. labor leader Serafino Romualdi, with U.S. government approval and possibly its financial help, visited Guatemala, in vain, to drum up pro-U.S. support within Guatemalan labor.<sup>32</sup> In July and August, 1947, the State Department's Chief of Division of Central American and Panama Affairs, Robert Newbegin, visited Guatemala to voice the Department's opposition to the aforementioned labor code articles.<sup>33</sup> United States officials in the main apparently accepted the U.S. businessmen's points of view with obvious ease, and demonstrated little empathy for the labor movement.

Fears of communism grew in 1947. In September, the Embassy reported that it had "no doubt that a communist organization exists in Guatemala and that known communists have received support from the president himself." The Embassy speculated that Arévalo's publicly professed dislike for communism might be "simply to pull wool over the eyes of the U.S."<sup>34</sup> U.S. government

officials also increasingly suspected Arévalo of international activities beneficial to the communist cause, including his support of the so called Caribbean Legion, a small military group formed to combat Caribbean dictators.<sup>35</sup>

In October, 1947, the State Department requested the Embassy to make an in-depth report on communism in Guatemala. The report still had not been finished in April of 1948, prompting the State Department to make a follow up request, because "an urgent need has developed" for the report on communism.<sup>36</sup> Milton K. Wells, First Secretary of the Embassy, finished his report, "Communism in Guatemala," in May, 1948.<sup>37</sup> According to Wells, communism had made "startling progress" between 1944 and 1947, and had reached "dangerous proportions."<sup>38</sup> The PAR platform on social, labor, and economic issues exhibited a "strong Marxist influence."<sup>39</sup> Although communists numbered "probably not more than two hundred," in all of Guatemala, their influence reached a level "far out of proportion to their numbers," partly because they remained undercover; and partly because some of them held key positions.<sup>40</sup> A few suspects remained in FPL and RN, but most were in PAR, while communism had made "serious headway" in labor.<sup>41</sup> In the international field, government policy "all too frequently coincides with

Soviet policy"<sup>42</sup> "Strong overtones" of class warfare existed, and a "strong current of class consciousness... prevails in the present revolutionary regime."<sup>43</sup> Arévalo "is an open and vociferous champion of labor," and communists occupy "positions of importance" in Arévalo's presidential office.<sup>44</sup> Arévalo was "a political opportunist of the extreme left, who admits the fallacies of Marxism, but who believes that the chief function of the State is to champion the underprivileged and force needed social and economic reforms upon the intransigent conservatives and the 'reaction.'<sup>45</sup>

However, Wells believed that the trend toward communism "seemingly has been reversed by the forces for moderation and unless unforeseeable developments check this trend, communism should be contained."<sup>46</sup> An attempt in 1947 to establish a Marxist party had failed, "and there is no evidence which would indicate that plans in that direction now exist."<sup>47</sup> The current political trend, in early 1948, was moving more toward the center, as indicated by FPL displeasure with PAR.<sup>48</sup> The opposition of the "propertied classes" had become stronger and better organized.<sup>49</sup> Guatemala remained an agricultural country, not industrialized, with a "relatively sound" economy and no extreme misery.<sup>50</sup> The armed forces retained a privileged and powerful role

in Guatemala, and communist influence within the military remained "non consequential."<sup>51</sup> The recent rioting at Bogotá had had "a sobering influence upon all but the extremist elements in Guatemala."<sup>52</sup> Russian world expansionist plans had recently become better understood in Guatemala, also producing a sobering influence.<sup>53</sup> Finally, "persistent rumors" continued to indicate that a military coup would soon eradicate Arévalo and the communists.<sup>54</sup> All in all, United States security was not in danger. The "chief concern" for the moment was the possible harm that communist influences might inflict upon UFCo and IRCA.<sup>55</sup> The State Department rated the Wells report on communism an "outstanding despatch." Wells received a letter of commendation from the Director of the Office of the Foreign Service, noting that his report had been "rated EXCELLENT."<sup>56</sup>

Fears for U.S. national security would remain for a time a relatively minor factor in Guatemalan relations. Only occasionally was the subject directly treated. A State Department Policy Statement on Guatemala, dated August 17, 1948, for example, recognized security concerns, but found little over which to be alarmed. The policy statement noted that leftist activity could endanger the United States' use during a future war of military aviation bases in Guatemala which during World

War II had served as a link with the Canal Zone and for long distance patrol, but which they were not in use in 1948. In case of war, the writers of the policy statement speculated that Guatemalan support for the United States would probably be prompt.<sup>57</sup>

Relations between the two nations, however, worsened. In 1948, Col. Mark A. Devine, Jr., military attaché to the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala, was charged with interfering in the internal affairs of Guatemala, and declared persona non grata.<sup>58</sup> The State Department demonstrated its resolve to get tough when Richard C. Patterson replaced Ambassador Kyle in September 1948. Patterson was a business impresario and former chairman of the board of Radio Keith Orpheum, from 1940 to 1944. According to Cole Blasier, "promotion was his specialty and U.S. business interests in Guatemala were his major concern."<sup>59</sup> Patterson had served as ambassador to Yugoslavia from late 1944 to May 1947, had proven himself to be an enthusiastic and fearless anti-communist. As expected, Patterson sided completely with U.S. business.<sup>60</sup>

During the remainder of 1948, the labor movement continued to gain strength, and serious conflicts between unions and U.S. companies occurred. A large Puerto Barrios dockworkers strike against UFCO in late 1948 led

to a confrontation with Arévalo. Both UFCO and the unions refused to compromise or accept arbitration, eventually causing a cutback in the UFCO shipping operations. National imports and exports were affected, and the Guatemalan economy slowed down. On January 28, 1949, an executive decree from Arévalo declared the port and UFCO plantation facilities to be "public utilities," which then gave the government the right to suspend the strike and order arbitration. UFCO defied the order, and twenty-four hours later shut down Puerto Barrios completely. UFCO escaped unpunished, and a new contract reached in March 1949, cut out many of the workers' demands.<sup>61</sup> However, UFCO pointed out that it had lost time and money combating labor strikes, and claimed that the new reform laws had begun to drain company coffers. UFCO financial reports for 1948 indicated that labor rights and benefits established by the Labor Code cost the company \$1,080,193, and social security dues and wage increases cost another \$83,697.<sup>62</sup>

A Policy Statement of May, 1949, expressed an increased displeasure with Guatemalan developments. Anti-United States propaganda in Guatemala continued, and the government had a "hostile attitude toward U.S. capital." Guatemala must "correct their unfair legislative and administrative treatment of American

enterprises.<sup>63</sup> In Central American affairs, Guatemala had joined "with a group of self-righteous democratic governments" which advocated the overthrow of dictators, thus leading to instability in the region.<sup>64</sup> No confidence could be demonstrated for the future. Four years of experience with Arévalo proved that little would change these attitudes, which were "injurious to the broad interest of Guatemala, of the United States, and of the world democratic cause."<sup>65</sup> The United States had failed to change these "inimical Guatemalan attitudes," in part because "the harmful nature and far-reaching effects of those attitudes have only recently become evident in all their extent."<sup>66</sup> The United States, however, remained confident that the situation would improve, because it was expected the pending end of Guatemala's wartime boom would make clear to the Guatemalans "the injurious nature of some of the extreme and ill-formed policies they have been following." Furthermore, the United States would not support Arévalo's overthrow. Although his policies were injurious to the democratic cause, "at the same time it must be recognized that Arévalo was popularly elected, appears to enjoy the support of the Guatemalan people, and on the whole is democratic in spirit and in action."<sup>67</sup> But relations between the countries continued

to worsen during 1949, and in June, shortly before the assassination of Francisco Arana, a State Department office memo noted that, especially during the previous few months, "things in Guatemala have not been going well for our national interests."<sup>68</sup>

Arévalo and the vast majority of the Arevalistas disbelieved that Guatemala was or could be a threat to U.S. national security, or world democracy, and they strongly believed that the United States, in turning against their reform movement, was defending selfish economic interests. Labor leader Manuel Pinto Usaga claimed that the Embassy and the U.S.-owned companies misinformed both Washington and the U.S. public about the true nature of the Guatemalan reform movement.<sup>69</sup> Arévalo himself advised Wells, just two weeks before Arana's death, that the situation in Guatemala was a part of "the worldwide struggle between capitalism and labor." In order to conquer communism, said Arévalo, injustice and the conditions that breed poverty (the "fertile soil for communist ideas,") must be eliminated. Furthermore, said Arévalo, U.S. policy added fuel to the cause of extremists.<sup>70</sup>

Guatemalans suspected the U.S. government and U.S. companies of contributing money and advice to rebellious factions of the opposition,<sup>71</sup> which could well have been

the truth; but hard evidence is lacking. Arévalo believed that UFCO helped finance the opposition: he called UFCO his "worst enemy."<sup>72</sup> According to Arévalo, UFCO made "a very strong campaign to pull me out of power."<sup>73</sup> U.S. archival records show that conspirators against Arévalo did at times contact United States officials, asking for aid or in one case the United States' "blessing,"<sup>74</sup> but the records (if they can be believed) indicate that aid was not given.

By July, 18, 1949, the day of Arana's death, the United States government had completely given up on Arévalo, and had developed only enmity for the reform movement in general. It had hoped that with time, and U.S. pressure, Guatemala would back away from its revolutionary ideology, but with Arana's death and the rise of Arbenz just the opposite would occur.

#### Notes

1. NAUS 814.00/11-1346 Memo.
2. NAUS 814.00/1-445 no.1948.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Arévalo, Escritos políticos, 65.
5. NAUS 814.00/1-945 tel.
6. NAUS 814.00/1-1345 no.17049.

7. NAUS 814.002/3-1745 no.2271.
8. NAUS 814.011/3-2945 no.2315.
9. NAUS 814.00/4-2445.
10. NAUS 814.00B/8-2345.
11. El Libertador, Jan. 13, 1945, p.1.
12. SAMF to IRCA, Jan. 17, 1946, AGC, Ministerio de Gobernación, Varios.
13. Handy, "Revolution," 108.
14. NAUS 711.14/1-1945 no.1995.
15. Richard Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention (Austin, 1982), 83; North American Congress on Latin America, Guatemala (New York, 1974), 50.
16. Immerman, The CIA, 83; also see Jim Handy, Gift of the Devil (Boston, 1984), 81-85.
17. Adler, Public Finance, 34; Alfonso Bauer Paiz, Como opera el capital yanqui en Centroamérica: el caso de Guatemala (Mexico, 1956), 331; Handy, Gift, 82.
18. Immerman, The CIA, 72.
19. Bauer Paiz, Como opera, 360.
20. NAUS 814.00/8-146 Memo.
21. NAUS 814.00/9-1246 no.1736.
22. Kyle's letter to Assistant Secretary of State Spruille Braden, dated October 1945, demonstrates Kyle's feelings. Kyle wrote: "I desire to state that I have become intimately acquainted with many of the most successful businessmen and finca owners. They are the balance wheels" of this country. I am in hope that I can convince them that it takes time to develop and build a Democracy, but that the final result is so much to be

desired, as is so well demonstrated in the effort and the patience which are essential in accomplishing such a desirable end. This is truly a wonderful country. There are many fine people here. They have all been so kind and friendly to me and Mrs. Kyle. I am now terribly anxious to help them not only in the development of their natural resources but in building a real Democracy."

NAUS 814.00/10-145 no.681.

23. NAUS 814.00/9-1246 no.1736.
24. NAUS 711.14/12-1745.
25. NAUS 814.00/10-145 no.681.
26. NAUS 814.00/8-3045 no.682.
27. NAUS 814.00/11-1346 Memo.
28. NAUS 711.14/12-246 Memo.
29. NAUS 814.00/1-247.
30. NAUS 814.6156/11-2247 tele. Guatemala claimed that seven native companies were also affected.
31. Ibid.
32. Cole Blasier, The Hovering Giant (Pittsburg, 1976), 57.
33. NAUS 814.00/7-1547. For details on Department reaction to the labor code, see United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States 1947: The American Republics (Washington, 1972), 705-719.
34. NAUS 814.00/10-247 Memo.
35. Frankel, "Political Development," 68-78; Charles Ameringer, The Democratic Left in Exile (Miami, 1974), 66-67.
36. NAUS 814.00B/4-1348 no.A-74.
37. NAUS 814.00B/5-648 no.217.
38. Ibid., 1.
39. Ibid., 3.

40. Ibid., 4.
41. Ibid., 5.
42. Ibid., 13.
43. Ibid., 14.
44. Ibid., 15.
45. Ibid., 16.
46. Ibid., 1.
47. Ibid., 3.
48. Ibid., 19.
49. Ibid., 20.
50. Ibid., 19.
51. Ibid., 20.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 21.
54. Ibid., 22.
55. Ibid.
56. NAUS 814.00B/5-648 CS/A.
57. NAUS 711.14/8-1748 Policy Statement.
58. NAUS OIR 5123, 65.
59. Blasier, Hovering Giant, 59.
60. For more detail on Patterson, see Immerman, The CIA, 98-99.
61. Bush, "Organized Labor," part 2, pp.27-28.
62. Ibid., part 3, p.35.
63. NAUS 711.14/5-1349 Policy Statement, 1-2.

64. Ibid., 9.
65. Ibid., 14.
66. Ibid., 3.
67. Ibid., 14.
68. 711.14/6-749 Memo.
69. Manuel Pinto Usaga, "Dos embajadores,"  
Diario de la Mañana, p.5.
70. NAUS 711.14/6-3049.
71. Baur Paiz, Como opera, 322-323; NAUS  
814.00/5-2846 no.1412; 814.00/1-1149 no.23;  
814.00/10-748 no.511; Celhelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 120.
72. Juan José Arévalo, interview with author,  
Guatemala City, July 14, 1986.
73. Juan José Arévalo, letter to author, April  
15, 1984.
74. NAUS 814.00/4-846; 814.00/10-946 no. 1483;  
814.00/4-1046; 814.00/3-2647; 814.00/7-2749 no.397.

CHAPTER 12  
ELIMINATION OF ARANA, 1949

Colonel Francisco Arana, chief of the Armed Forces and ex-member of the post-revolution Junta, met his death in July, 1949, killed by men who supported Jacobo Arbenz and President Arévalo. A small civil war then broke out between forces loyal to the Guatemalan government and Arbenz, and the forces which remained loyal to Arana. The Arana forces lost; the leftist political elements, in particular the Partido Acción Revolucionaria (PAR), Renovación Nacional (RN), and the Marxists, gained greater political power. Arbenz had his road to the presidency nearly guaranteed, while Arevalista moderates, in particular the Frente Popular Libertador (FPL), continued to lose power and influence in 1950. Arana's death would greatly alter Guatemalan political reality.

The story of Arana's death has remained controversial up to the present day. By best accounts, however, on July 18, 1949, Col. Arana drove to the chalet Morlon in Amatitlán to inspect a recently discovered cache of 500 rifles, accompanied by Col. Felipe Antonio Girón (Chief of the Presidential Staff), Major Absalón Peralta (Arana's aide), and Francisco Palacio (Arana's

driver). Chief of police Col. Víctor Sandoval followed Arana in another car. On the return trip Arana and the three men in his car traveled alone, because Col. Sandoval had driven back earlier. Approaching the bridge La Gloria, Arana found his path blocked by a vehicle, and he stepped from his car to investigate the trouble. Suddenly a group of men, including congressman Alfonso Martínez Estévez and others associated with the government and Arbenz, emerged from a vehicle positioned behind Arana. Shooting started from somewhere, possibly several places, and Arana fell to the ground dead.<sup>1</sup>

When news of the killing reached Arana's followers in the capital, they reacted with an attack on the National Palace which launched a two day civil war between Arana's followers and government forces. Officers and civilians loyal to Arana commanded the important Army barracks Guardia de Honor and possibly ninety percent of the soldiers.<sup>2</sup> The government forces consisted of the Arbenz faction in the Army, the Air Force, the police, members of the so-called Caribbean Legion, and armed units of workers. The civilian forces proved to be especially valuable.<sup>3</sup> The cadets of the Escuela Politécnica also joined the government troops.<sup>4</sup> Aerial strafings, bombings, and ground combat marked the fighting, all of which took place in Guatemala City, and

several hundred people were killed. In the evening of the 19th, the leaders of the Arana forces agreed to a nearly unconditional surrender.<sup>5</sup>

During the months before Arana's death, his relations with the leftists had worsened, and grown critical. In addition, Arana and Arévalo had long known a strained relationship over their political differences. According to General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, President Arévalo once said of his relationship with Arana that "there are two presidents in Guatemala, and one (Arana) is constantly pointing a machine gun at the other."<sup>6</sup> Apocryphal or not, the statement reflects both Arana's great power as head of the military and his political differences with Arévalo. Rumors of an Arana-led coup d'état became increasingly prevalent in 1948, rumors which suggested that the colonel only awaited the right opportunity and a reasonable excuse to overthrow Arévalo.<sup>7</sup> In February of 1949, a United States Embassy report stated that Arana and Arévalo had completely broken off what remained of their working relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Arana gave no open indication that his relations with the government had degenerated, but he worked to strengthen his hold over the military. Under the Constitution, to be a candidate for president Arana had to resign his military post six months before the

elections, which were to be held on November 10, 11, and 12 of 1950. Arana most of all needed to gain control of the next Consejo Superior de Guerra. The council would be elected in July of 1949, by the top military leaders in secret ballot. Council members would then have the responsibility of sending the names of three men to Congress, of whom one would be elected the Chief of Armed Forces to serve under the next president. The Embassy reported that Arana successfully arranged and won the election but that Arbenz demanded another election. According to the report, Arana's men also won the second election, but the Embassy could not be sure that it had obtained the correct information.<sup>9</sup> Ronald Schneider claims the second vote had not been taken, but rather had been scheduled for late July.<sup>10</sup> Arbenz later claimed final voting had been scheduled for the day that Arana died.<sup>11</sup> In any case, it was crucial that Arana control the Supreme War Council in order to retain his command over the military, and the Council elections caused much turmoil.

Arana also sought to secure power in other ways. On July 16, he replaced the head of the Air Force, Col. Francisco Consenza, with an Aranista, Lt. Col. Arturo Altolaguirre. On the same day Arana ordered a full confiscation of arms held by the Caribbean Legion. Arana

did not trust the Legion, and feared that they might become involved in internal politics.<sup>12</sup>

The official report of the Arévalo government claimed that Col. Arana had been killed by unknown criminals. The report praised Arana, and noted that although many enemies of the Arévalo government had tried to persuade Arana to lead a coup d'état, Arana had always remained a loyal revolutionary. But the official version also noted that Col. Arana had steadfastly refused a friendly alliance with the President.<sup>13</sup>

Another version of the killing held that Arana's own followers had assassinated Arana in order to promote a rebellion against Arévalo.<sup>14</sup> According to this version, Arana's supporters had grown tired of the colonel's refusal to overthrow Arévalo. Arbenz and Arévalo would receive the blame for Arana's murder, and the Aranistas could proceed with their desired coup.

The official report and also the second version can be discounted. Too many witnesses saw the killers, and recognized some as having connections with Arbenz or Arévalo. Men who reportedly had a hand in the killing were Col. Víctor Sandoval (Director of National Police and Arévalo's brother-in-law), Lt. Col. Enrique Blanco (sub-director of the police), Alfonso Martínez and Caribbean Legion Commander Francisco Morazán (both

confidants and later private secretaries of Arbenz), Lt. Carlos Bracamonte (an aide to Arbenz), Carlos A. Palmieri (friend of Arbenz), and the Minister of Communications Col. Carlos Aldana Sandoval.<sup>15</sup> Although proof is lacking, and some of these men may have been wrongly accused, it is clear that associates of Arbenz and Arévalo did the shooting, a fact which Arbenz admitted in 1968.<sup>16</sup>

One interpretation holds that Arana's death had been an accident. According to Arbenz, President Arévalo ordered Arbenz to do anything necessary to stop Arana. Arbenz met with political leaders, and they agreed to remove Arana as Chief of Armed Forces. Alfonso Martínez Estévez led a group of men to arrest Arana, but Arana's military aide pulled his gun, shooting started and Arana lost his life. Arbenz expressed great sorrow over this misfortune.<sup>17</sup> Pellecer claims that no one wanted to silence Arana, but only to exile him, "to leave him with his mouth open and moving."<sup>18</sup> Arévalo agreed that Arana's death had been accidental, as did Marroquín Rojas.

The idea that Arana died accidentally during the arrest attempt has some merit. In the past, leaders accused of coup attempts against the government had never been intentionally killed, only jailed or exiled. No one after Arana was killed under Arévalo. Both friends and

foes of Arévalo, including long time opponent Clemente Marroquín Rojas, have found it difficult to believe that Arévalo, a sincere humanist, would approve the killing of Arana.<sup>19</sup> This author also believes that murder would be foreign to Arévalo's character and public record. Arévalo himself has flatly denied direct responsibility for the murder,<sup>20</sup> and he has remained quiet about his possible role in an arrest attempt.

In spite of the above testimonies to the contrary, the men who shot Arana have been widely accused by Arévalo's opposition of premeditated murder. In support of this view, Francisco Palacio, Arana's driver and an eyewitness, testified that the killers had given Arana no chance to submit peacefully.<sup>21</sup> Also, a North American who investigated the killing interviewed eyewitnesses and concluded that the Chief of the Presidential Staff, Col. Felipe Antonio Girón, shot Arana in the back when he left the car.<sup>22</sup>

Premeditated murder is certainly a possibility. It would have been difficult to keep the militarily powerful Arana in jail or exile, thus his murder may have been deemed necessary. The circumstances at the site of the killing, with a blocked vehicle and many armed men, would have been more in keeping with an ambush than an arrest. Nájera speculated that Arévalo may not have

ordered the killing, but that Arbenz and others took the matter into their own hands.<sup>23</sup>

According to rumors that circulated widely in Guatemala preceding Arana's death, Arana was planning to overthrow Arévalo. The United States Embassy reported that a fairly reliable source claimed that Arana had planned a coup for July 18, the day of his death.<sup>24</sup> Arbenz agreed, and claimed that on the 16th Arana gave the President an order to dissolve the cabinet within 48 hours, by 10 P.M. on July 18; or face a coup. According to Arbenz, Arana had long been urged by civilian and military conservatives, as well as by representatives of the U.S. Embassy, to overthrow Arévalo, and Arana felt he had to act or lose a segment of his supporters.<sup>25</sup>

Arana, however, probably had not planned any coup against Arévalo, at least not for the day of his death. Circumstances surrounding Arana's death indicate that he had not readied himself for a military struggle. He and his followers appeared surprised and unprepared for the attack. Arana had been making an inspection of a cache of arms about fifteen miles from Guatemala City; he had taken no armed guard, and he made no secret of his movements. Such activities would have been absurd for a man who had threatened the President with an overthrow, scheduled to take place that very day. Nor did Arana's

soldiers and political supporters in Guatemala City appear to expect any trouble, for the government easily succeeded in weakening the pro-Arana forces before knowledge of the killing became public. Arévalo sent for Aranista Col. Francisco Oliva, commander of the crucially important Guardia de Honor. Oliva left his post and appeared at the palace, where Arbenz placed him in custody.<sup>26</sup> Other top commanders were also apprehended and held at the palace.<sup>27</sup> Such easy capture would have been improbable for men allegedly ready to attack the President on the same day. Nor were the Aranistas in the Air Force ready for conflict. Francisco Consenza and six men captured Air Force headquarters, while the Aranista Air Force commander, Col. Altolaquirre, had been at home.<sup>28</sup> After the fighting started, the Aranistas fought poorly. A telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy at Caracas claimed that the Aranistas' movements lacked plan or coordination, and that they probably proceeded by spontaneous reaction.<sup>29</sup> All told, it seems very unlikely that Arana had planned a coup.

The government forces were better prepared: they were expecting a reaction after Arana's arrest or death. Their most formidable weapon had been surprise. If Arana had taken the initiative instead of the government, or if

Arana had been allowed an even chance, the outcome could well have been reversed.

After the death of Arana, the government launched a propaganda campaign to convince the public that the Aranistas had rebelled. Organized labor and pro-Arévalo politicians joined the effort. Many gave public speeches in support of Arévalo, including the FPL Secretary of Propaganda, Marco Antonio Villamar.<sup>30</sup>

Many other Guatemalans denounced the death of Arana and accused the government of having plotted his murder. Over the next several months, anti-government demonstrations were held, and pamphlets which denounced the assassination of Arana were passed to the public. The United States Embassy also believed that Arana's death had not been accidental, and all Embassy dispatches refer to the incident as the "Arana assassination." With Arana's death, tensions and animosities reached new extremes.

#### Notes

1. There is no agreement on the particulars of the killing. For the account of Francisco Palacio, see the Managua newspapers, including Novedades, of late July 1949. For a United States Embassy report, see NAUS 814.00/2-1049 Memo, Air Intelligence Information Report.

2. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 121.

3. Bush, "Organized Labor", part 5, 13-14; On August 1, Nuestro Diario pleaded to the civilians to return their explosives, arms and munitions to the Army. Nuestro Diario, August 1. 1949, p.7.

4. Samayoa Coronado, Escuela, 23.

5. For an extended version of the fighting, see the report of Col. Willis F. Lewis, NAUS 814.00/7-2249 no. 366.

6. Ydígoras, My War, 226.

7. NAUS 814.00/11-1248 no.564.

8. NAUS 814.00/2-1649 no.85. Arévalo denies this. See "El Doctor Arévalo responde al Licenciado Alvarado Rubio," La Hora, Dec. 7, 1982, p.4.

9. NAUS 814.00/7-2249 no.386.

10. Schneider, Communism, 29.

11. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 120. For the version of Carlos Paz Tejada, see Carlos Cáseres, Aproximación a Guatemala (Sinaloa Mexico, 1980), 43-46.

12. NAUS 814.00/72249 no.386.

13. "El gobierno informa al pueblo de la nación," July 21, 1949, AGC, unfiled papers and documents for 1949.

14. Nuestro Diario, August 2, 1949, p.3; Thomas and Margorie Melville, Guatemala: the Politics of Land Ownership (New York, 1971), 42.

15. NAUS 814.00/2-2349 no.97.

16. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 121. Arbenz had tried to watch the events with binoculars.

17. Ibid., 120-121.

18. Pellecer, "Respuesta," 2.

19. "Platicamos con el Dr. Arévalo," La Hora, Sept. 13, 1972.

20. "'La sangre de Arana es, no lo niego, una mancha sobre mi gobierno' declaró Juan José Arévalo," El Imparcial, Dec. 6, 1961; "Habla Arévalo," Prensa Libre, Jan. 10, 1962.
21. NAUS 814.00/2-2349 no.97.
22. NAUS 814.00/2-1049 Memo, Air Intelligence Information Report.
23. Nájera, Estafadores, pp.111-112.
24. NAUS 814.00/7-2249 no.386.
25. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 120.
26. NAUS 814.00/7-2249 no.386.
27. Cehelsky, "Habla Arbenz," 121.
28. NAUS 814.00/7-2249 no.386.
29. NAUS 814.00/7-2049
30. Onda Larga, (July 1949), 11.

## CHAPTER 13 THE ARBENZ COALITION

Arbenz won the presidential election of 1950, supported heavily by Partido Acción Revolucionario (PAR), Renovación Nacional (RN), labor, and some progressive capitalists. The leftists had finally secured power, and they were gleeful. Arana had been eliminated, and Arbenz, the friend of PAR and the workers, controlled the military. Rural and urban labor unions continued to grow in size and power. The United States had become an essential part of the opposition, but so far demonstrated no plans to intervene militarily. Although significant numbers of Arevalistas had wanted someone else besides Arbenz for president, only the extreme opposition demanded a violent overthrow of legal government. In private, Arbenz promised moderation to those who feared the far left. Many who had preferred other candidates agreed to join the Arbenz government, including Manuel Galich and Raúl Osequeda, who would become cabinet ministers. Arbenz was indubitably the choice of the majority, and when Arévalo passed on the presidential office peacefully and willingly, as required by the

Constitution, a legal and democratic system of government seemed to be functioning. María Villanova de Arbenz wrote to the wife of Enrique Muñoz Meany that "we all have faith and confidence in the future and even suspect that some reactionaries are content because of the anticipated tranquillity that surely will guarantee their economic investments."<sup>1</sup>

Pro-government forces continued to strive for the success of the reform movement. Notably, on December 12, 1949, Congress passed the Law of Forced Rental, which obligated many landowners to rent part of their land to the peasants at a fair price. Congress also passed two laws in 1949 designed to reduce the political freedom of government opponents, although the government did not use the laws to their full potential.<sup>2</sup> The first law, passed by Congress on September 13, gave the government the right to discharge any employee considered disloyal to Guatemala. The law in theory affected all government employees, or about 50,000 people.<sup>3</sup> Diario de Centro América advised its readers that tolerance for non-reformist government employees "was not worth it."<sup>4</sup> The second law, decree 666, received Arévalo's signature on September 24. The law was primarily aimed at the press, and provided punishment for journalists who by their writings "incited disregard for the law." Decree

666 also enacted new penalties against clergymen who became involved in politics.

Causing the opposition further alarm, the communists established two political parties during the year that followed Arana's death. The public appearance of communism, in spite of Article 32 of the Constitution which had previously been interpreted as prohibiting communism, attests to the greatly increased power of the leftists. Moreover, the communists had achieved influence in the labor leadership; had proven valuable supporters of the Arevalista reform movement; and, most importantly, had become allies of Arbenz in his quest for the presidency.

The Partido Comunista de Guatemala (PCG), with roots in the old Vanguardia, had its first congress on September 28, 1949, and its first formal session in January 1950. On May 20, 1950, a number of leading PAR members resigned in order to align themselves with the PCG, including ex-Secretary General José Manuel Fortuny, four members of the executive committee and two members of the political committee. Another communist party, Partido Revolucionario Obrero de Guatemala (PROG), formed on June 1, 1950.

The PROG, led by Víctor Manuel Gutiérrez, consisted of communists who spent much time working

directly with the people. Gutiérrez believed that the workers must take the initiative on their own behalf, or working class interests would be sacrificed to political ends and opportunism.<sup>5</sup> PCG, led by Manuel Fortuny, worked less directly with the people but tried to strengthen the communist movement through political and bureaucratic channels, and cooperating with the bourgeoisie.<sup>6</sup>

According to Ronald Schneider, the policy differences between Fortuny and Gutiérrez led to serious conflict. Carlos Manuel Pellecer concurs in stating that significant differences existed between Fortuny and Gutiérrez, but he believes that the clash did not cause deep divisions. According to Pellecer, the two leaders manifested complementary currents of thought. Fortuny's current followed the Soviet line of politics and international goals; and this group published Soviet style propaganda in the newsweekly Octubre. An able bureaucratic politician, Fortuny had smooth political relations with Arbenz. But (according to Pellecer) Fortuny disliked the working masses and did not work well with them. He had no rapport with city workers, and "he hated to visit rural localities and talk with peasants." On the other hand, Gutiérrez looked mainly to solving problems within Guatemala and paid full attention to the

plight of Guatemalan workers and peasants. Pellecer concluded that the two approaches produced reciprocal benefits, not division.<sup>7</sup>

Communism in Guatemala by 1950 had certainly become important, but observers disagreed on the actual degree of its influence. Much of the disagreement concerned who was a communist, and who was only a leftist but tolerant of communism. Reformers who supported the Arévalo government tended to see an important distinction between the two groups, while the opposition, including the United States government, tended to lump communists and those tolerant of communists into the same category.

Guatemalans of the political left in general saw the communists as allies in the struggle to overcome their conservative enemies and bring social and economic justice to Guatemala. Moreover, the left feared talk of anticommunism, because they knew that conservatives continued the traditional tactics of categorizing all leftists as communists. From their standpoint, any steps taken to eliminate the true communists would eventually lead to the doors of the "near-communists."

Communists held leadership positions in labor, the government, and political parties, although their actual numbers were small. A U.S. intelligence report placed the number of Guatemalan communists in mid-1950 at "well

under 500,"<sup>8</sup> a small figure when compared to the some 400,000 votes cast in the presidential elections of that year. The number of truly outstanding and influential communists was far less. Only a few communists had been elected to Congress: there averaged only about two communist congressmen under Arévalo. Nor had many communists been appointed to administrative posts. Examples would be Mario Alfredo Silva Jonama who served as sub-secretary of education for a few months, and Pellecer who once directed the *Misiones Culturales*. Mario Silva Jonama also became propaganda chief of government radio PAX, and Alfredo Guerra Borges became editor-in-chief of the Diario de Centro América, the official newspaper.<sup>9</sup> Most communists connected to the administration held minor jobs, however. The ministry which offered the most positions to communists proved to be that of foreign affairs.<sup>10</sup>

Communism strongly influenced the labor leadership by 1949. Some of labor's most outstanding leaders openly declared their communism, for example Victor Manuel Gutiérrez. Labor unions, however, did not officially embrace communism, and possibly a majority of labor leaders were not true communists, although non-communist leaders remained on the sidelines while the committed communists tended to maintain the initiative.<sup>11</sup> Ordinary

union members, rural workers, and Indians remained largely unaffected by communism.<sup>12</sup> Workers in general concerned themselves with wages and social rights, and showed little understanding of an international ideology. Labor leaders, even the communists, maintained more concern for internal reform than international politics.<sup>13</sup>

But the trend toward communism in labor had been strong. The FSG had broken away from the CTG in 1946 because of CTG far-left inclinations, but by 1949 both organizations had become ideologically similar. FSG Secretary General Manuel Pinto Usaga never declared himself a communist, but he demonstrated at least a strong leftist proclivity and a willingness to work closely with communists. In January 1950, FSG joined the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL) and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), pro-Soviet organizations which CTG had joined earlier. WFTU ties to Guatemalan labor had become strong by 1950, and Guatemalan labor leaders attended WFTU meetings, sometimes with help from the Guatemalan government.<sup>14</sup> Political aims espoused by the labor movement invariably included some demands typically championed by the World Federation, for example the recognition of China, and support for the anti-colonial struggles in Indonesia,

Vietnam, and Malaya.<sup>15</sup> The United States was often criticized, and the Soviet Union sometimes praised.<sup>16</sup> The United States Embassy considered both FSG and CTG as communistic organizations.<sup>17</sup>

The communists did not control Guatemala. They had virtually no influence in the police or armed forces.<sup>18</sup> Most Guatemalans, including the military, police, and even a majority of leftists including both Arbenz and Arévalo, would have opposed any attempts to create a true communist state, and would have quickly eliminated the handful of communists if they had felt so threatened. The reform movement in 1950 remained "fundamentally democratic in its objectives."<sup>19</sup>

The central political issue in 1950, however, was not communism, but the November presidential elections. Arbenz's power in Guatemalan politics increased greatly with the Arana killing, and he thus became the primary presidential contender. Some observers believed that Arbenz, after July 1949, had become more powerful than Arévalo. Minor Keihauer, a wealthy landowner, businessman, and political ally of Arbenz, told U.S. embassy officials that Arbenz was "in the saddle," that is, the strongest directing force in Guatemalan politics.<sup>20</sup> Mario Monteforte Toledo, the President of Congress at the time of Arana's death, believed that the

murder of Arana "concentrated all official politics in the grip of Arbenz."<sup>21</sup> Reliable observers have stated, however, that Arévalo remained a strong executive, and although Arbenz's power increased, Arévalo's did not decrease.<sup>22</sup>

Power relationships actually remained complex, and even in the military, Arbenz did not have unlimited influence. Certainly, Arbenz became the strongman within the armed forces with Arana's demise. The military was immediately purged of the most influential of Arana's followers, causing about twenty percent of the officers to experience exile, jail, or early retirement.<sup>23</sup> But many officers who remained were not leftists, and they gave Arbenz only lukewarm support. Morale had been badly shaken by Arana's death in 1949, and in 1950 relations within the military remained bitter and tense.<sup>24</sup> Possibly about 50% of the military officers retained conservative inclinations.<sup>25</sup> In a 1968 interview, Arbenz claimed he had wanted a full purge of all enemies in the army following his victory over the Aranistas. He planned to ship the defeated officers to El Petén "to try them in military courts and shoot them like traitors."<sup>26</sup> Arbenz blamed Arévalo for extending pardons which allowed conservatives and moderates to remain in uniform.<sup>27</sup> According to Arbenz, these anti-leftists who survived in

the military eventually caused the destruction of his presidency in 1954.<sup>28</sup>

Arbenz, however, still led the "young military" faction of the army, and with the death of Arana, the Arbenz faction had taken over the military's top command. Also, and just as important, Arbenz visited the various garrisons, and promised the conservative officers that leftists would not dominate in the Arbenz presidency. He indicated that he needed the leftists to get elected, but that in due course their power would be weakened.<sup>29</sup> Arbenz thus soothed the fears of the non-leftist officers, and kept the armed forces pacified during the presidential campaign.

Progressive capitalists who supported Arbenz established the Partido Integridad Nacional (PIN), which represented businessmen and landowners such as Keilhauer and Nicolás Brol Galicia. PIN opposed the extreme left, but supported land reform.<sup>30</sup> Arbenz promised the capitalists the same that he promised military officers: the communists and far-leftists would not control his government. Many Guatemalans did in fact believe that Arbenz would exercise the presidential powers as a political moderate, and that the leftists would eventually see their power diminished.<sup>31</sup>

Labor unions openly endorsed Arbenz, and became deeply involved in the election campaign, even though the Labor Code proscribed unions from political activities.<sup>32</sup> In December 1949 and January 1950 all of the most influential elements of labor formed a new organization called Comité Político Nacional de los Trabajadores (CPNT). Pinto Usaga became secretary general, and Gutiérrez became secretary of organization. On 24 February 1950 CPNT declared "the candidate of the working class and peasants to be Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán."<sup>33</sup> PAR, RN, and the newly formed communist parties also nominated Arbenz for President; and they campaigned actively and enthusiastically, in both rural and urban areas.

Evidence indicates that a few leftist elements had some misgivings about Arbenz. The United States Embassy claimed that labor worried about the "real depth of Arbenz's affection."<sup>34</sup> Pinto Usaga received a letter which complained that workers of at least one locality did not know enough about Jacobo Arbenz.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the Arevalista parties all had some dissenting members who did not champion Arbenz. An outstanding example is Carlos Leonidas Acevedo, who resigned from RN in 1950, and opposed the election of Arbenz.<sup>36</sup> Acevedo's high posts had included minister of government under Arévalo and secretary general of RN. Until 1950 Acevedo had been

one of the reform movement's most prestigious political leaders.

Certainly, Arbenz did not have the great popularity that Juan José Arévalo enjoyed in 1944. But hesitancy on the part of labor and the left in general remained minor, and in the main the left supported Arbenz. Pellecer observed that workers and peasants had "full confidence" in Arbenz.<sup>37</sup> Arbenz's bond to the political left was strengthened by his wife, María Cristina Vilanova, who retained leftist beliefs herself and was active in political matters. María evidently retained a measure of influence over her husband, and some observers, including Clemente Marroquín Rojas, claimed that María actually dominated her husband.<sup>38</sup>

Arévalo claims that he supported Arbenz for President after it became clear that Arbenz was the choice of the people.<sup>39</sup> Arévalo did not declare Arbenz the official candidate, nor did he openly declare his own support for Arbenz. But the Arbenz campaign received significant aid from the Arévalo administration. The Ministry of Communications in particular helped by lending personnel, vehicles, and other aids to the Arbenz campaign.<sup>40</sup> Government-supported newspapers worked for Arbenz, and President Arévalo's private secretary spoke in Arbenz's behalf.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Mariano Arévalo, brother

of President Arévalo, appeared on the platform with Arbenz during the campaign. Mariano, a close and trusted political supporter of President Arévalo, became head of the Departamento de Fincas Nacionales e Intervenidas (Department of National and Intervened Farms), in August, 1950, a position that gave him some influence over the farm workers' vote. The board of directors, who had elected Mariano, had themselves been appointed by President Arévalo.<sup>42</sup>

Arévalo may have merely backed the popular choice of the people, but he also may have backed Arbenz for an additional reason: i.e. he believed that Guatemala needed a strong ruler to combat the obstacles to reform. Arévalo had worked hard to promote social and economic changes, but political difficulties had often impeded his efforts. On November 7, 1949, Arévalo stated during a public speech that he was glad to finish his term in office "because personally I have no appetite, nor wish, nor interest, nor advantage in continuing one day longer" than the presidential term. He could not continue as president, he stated further, because he could not maintain much longer his "white glove policy" which avoided "shedding blood." He called his style of government "romantic," because he valued and believed in humanity and democracy. He recommended that the next

president act "with a little more realism in regard to the treatment of conspirators." The next government would also have to solve the nation's economic problems "with methods which are not very romantic."<sup>43</sup> Arbenz, a practical military man of progressive ideas, appealed to Arévalo. Moreover, while Arbenz promised Guatemala social and economic modernization, a vigorous program of land reform, and the end of imperialist domination, he did not run a radical campaign or make extreme promises to workers; his political speeches seemed moderate, even to North American observers.<sup>44</sup>

The area of greatest non-support in the Arevalista camp was the FPL. A strong segment of the FPL had backed Arana, and after their candidate's death they had been purged from the pro-government forces. Some lost their jobs, and some who had taken an active part in the "Arana uprising" went to jail. Hector España spent thirty days in jail.<sup>44</sup> Julio César Méndez Montenegro left active politics.<sup>45</sup> Mario Monteforte Toledo claimed that FPL members had the choice of joining the opposition or giving up to leftism.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. Embassy, in November 1949, reported that FPL lay weakened, a "has been" party, with the remnants closer to PAR than at any time since 1947.<sup>47</sup>

In 1950, the FPL continued to function, but it no longer enjoyed the power it held before July 1949. At the time of Arana's death, FPL had 28 members in Congress, PAR and RN had 25, and the opposition had 14. By November of 1950, five FPL members had switched to the Arbenz camp, two had claimed independent status, and one had resigned from Congress.<sup>48</sup> The 20 remaining FPL congressmen were profoundly disunited. "The remnants of the party are in an advanced state of collapse," reported the U.S. Embassy in October, 1950.<sup>49</sup>

FPL surviving members split their support between Manuel Galich López and Dr. Víctor Giordani. Grassroots elements of FPL had wanted Giordani but the party leadership decided to back Galich.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, the two groups issued rival posters and campaign literature, each claiming that their candidates had the endorsement of the party.<sup>51</sup> Both branches supported continued reforms, for example land reform, and both attacked Arbenz by claiming that an army officer as president would politicize the military and endanger the reform movement.<sup>52</sup>

Jorge García Granados, the "father of the 1945 Constitution," became a presidential candidate for moderate reform. In late 1949, he pooled support from the revolutionary parties to establish the Partido del

Pueblo.<sup>53</sup> The party began publishing the newspaper El Pueblo, which reported general events as would any newspaper but also advanced García's political views. El Pueblo championed revolutionary goals but emphasized non-extreme measures. On September 8, a political advertisement claimed that García was not a rebel or a communist but a reformist.<sup>54</sup> On September 18, the paper spoke in favor of land reform, but only reform based on moderation. First, El Pueblo claimed, Guatemala must divide and distribute the national lands, then buy the remaining large farms at a fair price and divide them into small farms.<sup>55</sup> García Granados claimed that the Arévalo government had failed to establish a rational program of reform, and had developed no wide based economic plan.<sup>56</sup> García would emphasize production, safe investment, a stable and peaceful work force, and an end to exploitation.<sup>57</sup> But García failed to develop a large following; he did not obtain the support of either the Arevalista parties or the conservative opposition.

The opposition had achieved a measure of better organization from 1944 to 1949 (see chapter 8), but in 1950 it failed to rally behind one candidate. The opposition suffered from strong differences of opinion, ambitious leaders and factions, government harassment, and, most important, a profound lack of popular support.

Unión Nacional Electoral (UNE), meant to be a coordinating organization for the opposition parties, suffered a rapid decline in strength in 1950,<sup>58</sup> and in October, the U.S. Embassy reported that the opposition remained "still as far from unification as ever, and will probably go down to defeat still bickering among themselves."<sup>59</sup>

Opposition efforts to overcome the reformers led to more violence. On July 19, 1950, the opposition promoted a demonstration in front of the National Palace, as an act of homage to Col. Francisco Arana and a protest against the Arévalo government. On the second day, pro-government groups joined with the police and army to disperse the protesters, violence broke out, and several people were killed. The government declared martial law, and Major Carlos Paz Tejada, chief of the armed forces, assumed command of Guatemala City for 12 days. Constitutional guarantees were suspended for 45 days. About 20 leaders of the demonstration were deported, including Manuel Cobos Batres, and Ramón Blanco. The opposition parties faced suppression and retribution after the July violence. In August, the National Election Board, controlled by Arevalistas, canceled the legal party status of two opposition political parties which had taken part in the July violence. The final

frustrated attempt before the elections to overthrow Arévalo occurred on November 6, when Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas led an armed force of about 70 men, in a vain plan to capture important military installations. About one-half of the rebels would be killed or wounded.<sup>60</sup>

Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, an ex-army general who refused to join the revolution of 1944, became the conservative opposition's chief candidate. By late 1950, Ydígoras and García Granados were Arbenz's only outstanding rivals. Both men claimed they confronted heavy political harassment and campaign obstructions, such as the destruction of party property and campaign literature. García Granados accused the police of breaking into his house and sacking the valuables.<sup>61</sup>

The November voting, which took place on the 10th, 11th, and 12th, produced a solid victory for Jacobo Arbenz. The final count gave Arbenz 266,778 votes, while Ydígoras received 73,180 and García drew 28,897. Giordani of FPL took 15,664. Manuel Galich of the other FPL branch withdrew his candidacy on the first day of the three-day election in order to back Arbenz. Eighty-six percent of the illiterate vote went to Arbenz, ten percent to Ydígoras and four percent to García. Of the literate vote, Arbenz drew fifty-six percent, Ydígoras

thirty-one percent and García twelve percent. In Guatemala City, Arbenz pulled 25,000 votes out of a possible 58,000.<sup>62</sup> The voting pattern demonstrated the importance of the peasants and workers to the Arbenz victory. Much of Arbenz's vote came from the workers on the large farms which had been unionized. In Guatemala City, where many middle class conservatives and moderates lived, he received less than one half of the votes.

Although Arbenz took most of the votes from the countryside, some peasants, possibly influenced by church pressures, remained politically conservative and voted for other candidates. Richard Adams recorded the election events in Magdalena Milpas Alpas, a small village which split its votes between Ydígoras and Arbenz. The village had two barrios, an "upper" and a "lower." The upper barrio consisted of Indians who were mostly small landowners. Politically and religiously conservative, they voted for Ydígoras Fuentes. The lower barrio had more ladino characteristics, and all the town's true ladinos lived there. They were less religious, and many held jobs outside the village. The lower barrio voted for Arbenz.<sup>63</sup>

There has been controversy as to whether the presidential elections were conducted fairly. Some have asserted that the elections were completely

honest,<sup>64</sup> where as Ydígoras claimed that only in the city did honesty prevail, and fraudulence characterized the countryside.<sup>65</sup> In fact, election abuses undoubtedly occurred, but only Arbenz with the backing of PAR, the communists, labor, as well as the tacit endorsement of the government, commanded the political forces necessary to obtain a majority vote. As to the alleged election abuses, one author sagely commented that "although Arbenz was probably the choice of more voters than were any of the opposition candidates, nothing was left to chance."<sup>66</sup>

Arbenz won the elections with a reformist coalition based on labor and peasants, leftist politicians, the "young military," and capitalist progressives. He had appeased some moderates and conservatives with promises to curb the power of communism and far leftists. The coalition promoted their candidate with energy, zeal, and confidence, and succeeded admirably although not to the level of 1944. Instability, however, underlay the coalition and the Guatemalan political reality as a whole. The killing of Arana had created a radical political polarization, and the rise of the communists reinforced this tendency. The year 1950 had been characterized by turmoil and conflict, between the pro-government forces and the opposition, and within each camp. The legitimacy of the

majority vote, which is the basic tenet of democracy, remained unacceptable to many in the sphere of Guatemalan politics. No consensus had been reached on the desired shape of a "new Guatemala": cooperation and agreement remained elusive.

#### Notes

1. María Villanova to Amalita, Guatemala City, Dec. 20, 1950, Biblioteca César Brañas, Cartas de Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.

2. NAUS 814.00/9-1749 no.512; El Imparcial, Jan. 7, 1950, p.1.

3. Silvert, A Study in Government, 33.

4. "Editorial," Diario de la Mañana, Oct. 23, 1949, p.1.

5. Schneider, Communism, 58-59, 61.

6. Ibid., 97.

7. Pellecer, "Respuesta," 7-8. On February 2, 1951, PROG dissolved and most members joined PCG. Pellecer noted that he followed the current of Gutiérrez, and Guerra Borges followed the current of Fortuny. Prominent communist who took a middle path included Mario Silva Jonama and Bernardo Alvarado Monzón.

8. NAUS OIR 5123,8.

9. Government radio stations were mainly apolitical. NAUS OIR 4615.10.

10. NAUS OIR 5123, 114-116.

11. Bush, "Organized Labor," part 4, p.41. See also Neal Pearson, "Guatemala: The Peasant Union Movement 1944-1954," in Henry A. Landsberger, ed., Latin American Peasant Movements (Ithaca, 1969), 348-349.
12. Ibid., part 3, pp.17, 33.
13. Pellecer, "Respuesta," 8.
14. Bishop, "Organized Labor," part 3, pp.104-5.
15. NAUS 714.00/4-350.
16. NAUS 714.00/1-2650.
17. Bush, "Organized Labor," part 3, p.16.
18. NAUS 714.00/8-450 no. 140.
19. NAUS OIR 5123, 78.
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42. NAUS 714.00/8-950 no.152.
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58. NAUS 714.00/10-1350 no.410.
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60. NAUS 714.00/11-750 no.481.
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63. Richard Newbold Adams, "Magdalena Milpas Altas: 1951-1952" in Richard Newbold Adams, comp., Political Changes in Guatemalan Indian Communities (New Orleans, 1957), 15.
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CHAPTER 14  
THE USA AND GUATEMALA,  
1949-1951

The United States and Guatemala remained in a state of official conflict during the remainder of Arévalo's presidency. The U.S. government continued to defend U.S. business in Guatemala, but by 1950 communism had become the issue of most ostensible importance. The growth of communism in Guatemala had actually paralleled the growth of the Cold War and fear of communism in the United States. Eric Goldman called 1949, the same year communist parties surfaced in Guatemala, a turning point for the United States, when the Alger Hiss case developed, Mao won in China, and the Soviets exploded an atom bomb. "1949 was a year of shocks, shocks with enormous catalytic force."<sup>1</sup>

In a strategy to increase awareness of the communist "threat" in Guatemala, the State Department and U.S. owned companies promoted an anti-Guatemala information campaign in the United States which sought to discredit the Guatemalan government to the North American public. By August, 1949, the Department had decided to have "open and frank discussions" with newspaper and

magazine correspondents about communism in Guatemala "to encourage them to go to Guatemala, to see for themselves what is going on and to acquire material for articles."<sup>2</sup> In 1950, the anti-Guatemala campaign would be aided by the Truman administration's Psychological Operations Coordinating Committee.<sup>3</sup>

The United Fruit Company conducted a propaganda campaign that was, in the words of Richard Immerman, "extremely successful."<sup>4</sup> Correspondents who traveled to Guatemala were well treated by UFCO, and most of them received the material for their stories directly from UFCO and U.S. Embassy officials. The positive aspects of Guatemala's reform movement were generally ignored.<sup>5</sup> During 1950, publications such as the New York Herald Tribune, Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Atlantic Monthly, and the Saturday Evening Post, all pictured Guatemala as a communist dominated country which unjustly persecuted American owed business. UFCO also obtained help from Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Representative John McCormack, who in 1949 gave anti-Guatemala speeches in their respective Congressional Chambers. Both men represented UFCO's home state of Massachusetts. Other Congressmen who would speak out against the Guatemalan treatment of US businesses included Representatives Christian Herter and Mike

Mansfield; and Senators Lister Hill, Claude Pepper, and Alexander Wiley.<sup>6</sup>

U.S. companies and the State Department also encouraged the Guatemalan local press to play up the communist issue. Secretary of State Dean Acheson himself once directed the Embassy to discreetly advise the "friendly" Guatemalan press to emphasize the communistic activities of Carlos Manuel Pellecer.<sup>7</sup> When U.S. officials were told by a "confidential source" that Guatemalan police had tortured a Guatemalan employee of International Railways of Central America (IRCA), Acheson directed that this story "leak out" to the Guatemalan local press, therefore to become "public knowledge," allowing the Embassy to obtain the story "from other than confidential sources."<sup>8</sup>

The United States used aid programs as an additional tool to pressure the Guatemalan government. Guatemala received aid in education, health, military training, public administration, agriculture, and a variety of programs designed to develop and modernize the nation. Aid and loans, for example, helped build hospitals and roads. Between 1946 and 1950, the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations gave substantial assistance to Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> Total aid to Guatemala, however, remained small.

As early as 1949, the State Department considered cancelling aid programs, as a protest to the Guatemalan government, but decided to continue existing programs and create no new ones.<sup>10</sup> The Arevalista government eventually came to believe that the State Department used the aid programs to spread pro-U.S. propaganda; and in 1950 Guatemala expelled the U.S. education mission and restricted the activities of U.S. agrarian and health specialists.<sup>11</sup>

From the Cold War viewpoint of the United States, cause for alarm did exist. By all indications, the communists had gained significant influence and power from 1944 to 1950. Communists were making concerted and energetic efforts to proselytize the Guatemalans and dominate the reform movement. International contacts were evident, and the United States was being heavily criticized. The government of Guatemala, in particular Arévalo and the Congress, had done little, in the eyes of the United States, to smother the communist movement. U.S. officials sometimes seemed irritated over the growth of communism, as did Milton K. Wells in a report on Partido Acción Revolucionaria (PAR):

It would perhaps be unnecessarily repetitious to comment on the pro-Communist slant on international issues found throughout the PAR statement. It is replete with the typical Communist line views on peace and democracy; and the monotonous tirade against foreign

"imperialistic" companies reveals an emotional devotion to the Arevalista thesis regarding the so-called need of achieving "full economic and political sovereignty."<sup>12</sup>

But the United States officials significantly overemphasized the danger of communism taking control of Guatemala; in part because they lumped together communists and "near-communists," thus incorrectly pushing influential men such as Charnaud MacDonald and Pinto Usaga into the communist camp. The "near-communists" did not identify themselves with the Marxist doctrine, even though they shared some common goals with the Guatemalan communists and felt no reason to hate or distrust them. U.S. officials worried that the differences between the communists and other leftists would become triflingly minor when U.S. interests were at stake. The U.S. Embassy reported that "clear cut lines between Marxism and leftist liberalism have yet to be drawn."<sup>13</sup>

In 1950, the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) in the Department of State compiled a comprehensive report on communist influence in Guatemala. Dated October 23, the report investigated communism, communists, and "near-communists," and on the whole was accurate, but in the end it overemphasized communist strength. The OIR report correctly noted that the communist movement had

made steady progress since 1944, becoming "almost inextricably a part of the Revolution," and that the communists had become some of "the most ardent leaders of the movement which is fundamentally democratic in its objectives."<sup>14</sup> The report recognized that communism had not permeated everywhere. Communism had made little headway with the rank and file of labor.<sup>15</sup> There existed "no evidence that the population as a whole or any considerable segment of it" had been responsive to communist programs.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet Union had no representative in Guatemala, although Guatemalan communists received educational material, "and presumably directives," from the Soviet Embassy in Mexico, and from communists throughout Latin America.<sup>17</sup> The anti-United States aspects of the reform movement could be best explained as a manifestation of nationalism rather than communism.<sup>18</sup> Communists had no influence in the police or armed forces. Communist and "pro-Communist" members in Congress had been few.<sup>19</sup> Neither did the report find anything extremely radical in the labor code or other pro-labor laws.<sup>20</sup> Arévalo's foreign policy toward neighboring countries had been supported by communists and communist propaganda, but otherwise, "the Guatemalan government had not pursued any policy which could be definitely attributed even in part to Communist

influence."<sup>21</sup> Communist influence on Guatemala's attitude toward the Inter-American system probably had been significant but "by no means" dominant.<sup>22</sup> Guatemalan actions in the United Nations revealed "little overt communist influence or significant pro-communist activity."<sup>23</sup>

The OIR report paid careful attention to all possible indications of communist influence. A study of one labor union's policy statement that expressed "a desire for peace and international solidarity, favored religious freedom and equality of women, and opposed the Rio Defense Pact," led OIR to conclude that each policy point in itself was "not necessarily communistic," but that the points taken together formed "a pattern similar to that of communists in other Latin American countries."<sup>24</sup> The OIR report treated the party programs of PAR and Renovación Nacional (RN) in much the same way and decided that:

An emphasis on agrarian reform, anti-imperialism, peace and democracy suggests, but is not necessarily evidence of, communist penetration in PAR and to almost the same degree in RN. This line, however, tends to echo the propaganda of known communists elsewhere in Latin America and is reasonably ascribable, in part at least, to influence<sup>25</sup> of militant communists in these parties.

The OIR report concluded that communists had become extremely powerful in Guatemala. Based "upon a

few intellectual, political, and labor leaders, the communists had obtained "considerable, and in some areas possibly decisive, influence in the government."<sup>26</sup> Communist influence in government, the political parties, and in the labor movement probably gave them "very nearly a balance of power position in strictly domestic political matters."<sup>27</sup>

U.S. officials rarely questioned the need to defend business interests. George McGhee of the State Department once cautioned his colleagues that the UFCO, because of its great importance in Guatemala, may have unduly influenced the opinions of the U.S. Embassy,<sup>28</sup> while one report indicated there were some differences of opinion in the State Department as to whether the UFCO stand on the labor code could be legally justified.<sup>29</sup> John Fishburn, the Labor Officer of the Office of Regional American Affairs, wrote a long memorandum on the latter question, in which he suggested that the disputed sections of the labor code were not far different from practices in the United States, and did not "warrant diplomatic aid to the UFCO." It would be unwise, Fishburn continued, "to be tied to the company's position without regard for Guatemala's aspirations or sovereign feelings." Such a position would allow the communists "to pose as champions of labor and national sovereignty" and

could threaten the entire Good Neighbor policy.<sup>30</sup> These few comments, however, did not alter the State Department consensus. Edward Clark of the Office of Middle American Affairs (MID) wrote to the embassy in Guatemala that "all of us here in MID think Fishburn is way off the beam in his thinking on this matter and have told him so."<sup>31</sup>

But one month later, in recognition that United States policies might have only strengthened the leftists and communists, the State Department made a minor change in tactics. It abandoned the use of the official and public protests against leftism, and only in private would United States representatives be allowed to make their views known. The policy makers theorized that some Guatemalans sympathized with the United States but could not do so openly without being branded as lackeys of the imperialists. If the United States could change its "reactionary" image, reformers who secretly opposed communism would lose their fear to oppose communism publicly. If the more moderate elements thus gained the confidence to oppose the radical left, the communists might become isolated from the main body of Guatemalan politicians. Thus separated, they would cause the United States interests less damage.<sup>32</sup> The new policy did not offer any substantial alteration of past policy. The Embassy continued its protest in private conversations,

and nothing in the new policy called for compromise or reconsideration of the United States interests. The State Department hoped that its change of approach would give the Guatemalan people a chance to eventually repudiate the communists, but if the Guatemalans failed to do so, the Department stood ready to revise its policy again.<sup>33</sup> The Department noted that the communist issue was less difficult in Guatemala than China, because Guatemalan geography and economics made it "much easier to exert force if, as a last resort, this should be necessary."<sup>34</sup>

By 1950 the United States needed more than an end of public protest against Guatemalan leftism in order to change its image. Furthermore, a middle group of political moderates who would acquiesce to the United States' uncompromising defense of UFCO, etc., essentially did not exist.<sup>35</sup> García Granados campaigned on a moderate reform ticket that criticized both Arbenz and Arévalo, but García remained under U.S. suspicion for his earlier links to the far left. Moreover, García remained a sincere reformer. Mario Monteforte Toledo, an FPL moderate and ex-President of Congress, actively opposed the rise of communism, but Monteforte told a North American friend that he retained three pet hates: communists, UFCO, and Ambassador Patterson.<sup>36</sup> Clemente

Marroquín Rojas, editor of the moderate-conservative La Hora newspaper, had become an early foe of the Arevalistas. The U.S. Embassy noted that Marroquín hated communism, was a devout Catholic, supported U.S. foreign policy and at times defended U.S. investments in Guatemala; but "it is doubtful that he has any particular affection for the U.S. and Americans."<sup>37</sup>

The Guatemalan government probably hoped its occasional repression of communists would soften U.S. anger. In 1950, the government discharged two Marxist editors from the Diario de Centro América. Mario Silva Jonama was dismissed from the government radio station, and arms were confiscated from several labor unions.<sup>38</sup> In September, Arévalo's strongly anti-communist Minister of Government, Col. Elfego Hernán Monzón, closed the communist newspaper Octubre and the Jacobo Sánchez School of Communist Doctrine; and late in the month submitted to the Congress a bill that would outlaw communism.<sup>39</sup> However, Monzón resigned when Congress approved an act of interpellation, 46 to 2, accusing the minister of employing illegal and unconstitutional conduct.<sup>40</sup>

The United States remained unconvinced that the Guatemalan government had sincere intentions to halt communism. The moves against communism, the State Department believed, resulted largely from

international developments and from internal political considerations.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the communists retained their influence in labor and elsewhere. Events still occurred which angered the United States. During the Central American Olympics in Guatemala, for example, to protest United States colonialism the Guatemalans initially refused to fly the United States flag or play the "Star Spangled Banner" when the Puerto Rican team appeared. "Colonies are not recognized in Guatemala" proclaimed the Diario de la Mañana.<sup>42</sup> In March, 1950, Guatemala's foreign minister and the ambassador to the U.S., under instructions from Arévalo, asked the State Department to recall Ambassador Patterson. The U.S. ambassador's incessant criticisms and demands, and his arrogance, had earned the enmity of Guatemala. Arévalo's ministers claimed that Patterson was so unpopular in Guatemala, that his life was in danger. As the State Department deliberated, rumors circulated that Patterson would soon be officially declared persona non grata.<sup>43</sup> Patterson left Guatemala in early April, and no other ambassador served under Arévalo.

Arbenz, meanwhile, in order to gain the United States' trust, had been trying hard to convince the Embassy that he was not a communist. Two or three days after Arana's death, Arbenz made an advance to the

Embassy through Minor Keilhauer, who, acting as Arbenz's messenger, reported that Arbenz had taken control of Guatemala and "U.S. interests would be better off." Keilhauer called Arévalo a trouble maker for the United States, and said the harmony between Arévalo and Arbenz had been partly feigned.<sup>44</sup> Arbenz repeated similar messages during the months that followed. On August 9, 1949, Arbenz had a lengthy discussion with Ambassador Patterson. Arbenz claimed to agree with Patterson that the United States companies had been badly treated by the reform movement, and promised to do his best to convince labor leaders to be more "reasonable". He claimed that union leaders trusted him "because they think I am a communist."<sup>45</sup> In early 1951, referring to communists, Arbenz told a representative of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development that "something would have to be done about these people, but that he (Arbenz) would have to move slowly and with great care."<sup>46</sup>

The United States officials were not convinced, feeling that Arbenz only sought increased U.S. aid and capital loans to Guatemala. Ambassador Patterson remarked that Arbenz wanted to play up to the United States for opportunistic reasons.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, although Arbenz had promised the Embassy that he would control leftism, the

Guatemalan political situation did not change. In August, 1950, one United States official noted that "at this time" there was "no chance of Guatemala receiving more aid."<sup>48</sup> In December, Arbenz lamented that, although he had tried hard to please the State Department, the United States' banks remained closed to Guatemala.<sup>49</sup>

The United States would settle for nothing less than a total or near total elimination of communists and "near-communists" from Guatemalan politics. As early as October 1949, the U.S. Embassy had concluded that "only a purge can bring about a real change for the better."<sup>50</sup> In the OIR report, it was recognized that Guatemala had indicated some willingness to restrain communism, but that the restraints would be "virtually negligible" if the government continued (as in fact it did) to accept communist support.<sup>51</sup> In a statement that foretold the future, the report had observed that "more effective cooperation with the U.S. would probably be possible under a non-communist authoritarian regime."<sup>52</sup>

The Office of Intelligence Research speculated on three possible avenues which Arbenz would have open to him concerning the communists. One, he could continue to accept their support. Two, he could establish a personal popularity with labor and ease the communists out. Three, he could establish a non-leftist military dictatorship.<sup>53</sup>

Only the second and third alternatives would be acceptable for the United States. The State Department recognized that the second would be difficult for Arbenz, as he lacked the "prestige and talent" needed to gain a popular following.<sup>54</sup> He had to rely on men like Gutiérrez and Pellecer to promote his support among the masses. The third possibility, a military dictatorship and a forceful suppression of communists, appeared "much more likely."<sup>55</sup> This third outcome was also expected by Ernest Siracusa, the Department of State Guatemalan desk officer.

#### Notes

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2. NAUS 814.00/8-149 Memo.
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5. Ibid., 113.
6. For detailed accounts of the UFCO campaign, see Immerman, The CIA, 111-118; and Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, Bitter Fruit: the Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala (New York, 1983), 79-86.
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10. NAUS 814.00/6-849 Memo; Immerman, The CIA,  
110.

11. Adams, "Social Change in Guatemala," 236.

12. NAUS 714.00/2-2350.

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15. Ibid., 17.

16. Ibid., 32.

17. Ibid., 33.

18. Ibid., 57.

19. Ibid., 55.

20. Ibid., 56.

21. Ibid., 64.

22. Ibid., 67.

23. Ibid., 68.

24. Ibid., 18.

25. Ibid., 23.

26. Ibid., 79.

27. Ibid., 81.

28. U.S., Foreign Relations: 1950, 902.

29. Ibid., 898.

30. Ibid., 880-884.

31. Ibid., 903.

32. Ibid., 880-884; NAUS 714.00/5-1050 Memo.
33. NAUS 714.00/5-1050.
34. Ibid.
35. Piero Gleijeses, "Guatemala: Crisis and Response" in Richard R. Fagan and Olga Pellicer, eds., The Future of Central America (Stanford, 1983), 187-188.
36. NAUS 714.00/5-2550.
37. NAUS 714.00/10-1050; Also see OIR 5123, 74.
38. OIR 5123, 53.
39. Ibid.
40. Istmania, 39 (Oct. 20, 1950), 3.
41. OIR 5123, 53.
42. U.S., Foreign Relations: 1950, 867.
43. Ibid., 875; Immerman, The CIA, 99.
44. NAUS/711.14/7-2249 no. 385.
45. NAUS 711.14/8-1249 no. 435.
46. NAUS 711.14/1-1851 Memo.
47. NAUS 711.14/7-2249 no. 385.
48. NAUS 814.00/8-1149 no.433.
49. U.S., Foreign Relations: 1950, 908.
50. NAUS 814.00B/10-749.
51. OIR 5123, 85.
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56. NAUS 814.00/7-2949 Memo.

CHAPTER 15  
SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATIONS

Commentators on Guatemalan history have often characterized the Arbenz period, 1951-1954, as a time of more profound reforms than what occurred under Arévalo, largely because of the 1952 land reform law.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the land reform measures went beyond what Arévalo enacted, but it was only with the hard-won reforms under Arévalo that land reform could be achieved in 1952. Arévalo's outstanding legacy was the growth of labor unions, both urban and rural, the growth of labor rights, for example the social security system, and the increased political awareness of the workers. Indeed, Arévalo and the Arevalistas not only enthusiastically worked to bring immediate reforms, but strived to pave the way for future reforms. Also, it should be remembered that many of the people active under Arévalo remained active under Arbenz, and it was these Guatemalans who had envisioned, and worked for, many of the reforms that took place between 1945 and 1954. A line of differentiation between the Arévalo and Arbenz presidencies should not be drawn too distinctly.

Marxist writers have generally accused Arévalo and many of the Arevalistas of lacking a sincere commitment to reform. Marxists of course find fault with Arévalo's anti-communism, and further note that very little land reform occurred 1945-1951. Generally, Marxist writers depict the Arévalo period as one dominated by bourgeois, middle class interests, at the expense of more far-reaching popular reforms.<sup>2</sup>

Marxist and non-Marxist writers have criticized Arévalo because they thought his ideas were too unclear and unrealistic. This line of thought, also propagated by the U.S. Embassy, began in 1944. The critics felt Arévalo's doctrine of spiritual socialism lacked a pragmatic approach to government and failed to offer a definite plan or structure for reform. Mario Nájera noted that "many people who are considered cultured or versed in practical matters mocked what Arévalo called spiritual socialism."<sup>3</sup>

"Spiritual socialism" was certainly abstract and out of the ordinary; and worse, "socialism" in the title had a non-democratic ring. Dion translated the following typical statement from Arévalo:

Spiritual socialism will surpass the philosophy of national socialism which grants the status of personality solely to the chief. Like liberalism, spiritual socialism will restore to the personality all of its civil and moral grandeur, but it will go further than liberalism in

obligating man to leave his isolated position to enter the sphere of social values, to embrace the needs and goals of society understood simultaneously as economic organism and spiritual entity.

Authors have been further misled by Arévalo's campaign and early presidential speeches, where he at times adopted a soft and conciliatory line towards the economic upper class, trying to promote unity, and his own security. (Arévalo hoped that his leadership, and the moral force of the revolutionary ideals, would eventually win over even the opposition.) Furthermore, during his presidency, while trying to balance and overcome political disunity and the U.S. and Guatemalan opposition, Arévalo made political moves and statements that could appear rightist, middle of the road, or leftist. But a careful study demonstrates that Arévalo had been solid in his reformist and democratic goals at the time of his election, and always pursued them thereafter.

Arévalo, as president of Guatemala, never entirely stopped being Dr. Arévalo the teacher. A forceful, effective, and popular teacher, Arévalo believed that the position of presidency could be used to "teach" high ideals and democracy to the Guatemalan people. Education, he felt, was a key to the future, to be instilled in each person individually and in the nation

as a whole. Arévalo especially held great confidence in the potential of the young, and encouraged their participation in Government.

Arévalo is thus often seen as an idealist, a "romantic", and indeed he had high ideals and hopes. But Arévalo was not solely an idealist, unaware or unable to accept the many obstacles he faced. Education, and his teaching talents, according to Arévalo's strategy, were to be used as political tools which would promote the positive, and obtain the best from both the politicians and the people. One Arevalista congressmen said that "when Arévalo met with us, it was like sitting in a classroom"<sup>5</sup> Another congressman called Arévalo's method of government "politics by instruction."<sup>6</sup>

Arévalo also used aggressive force and raw political power to overcome threats and obstacles. He instructed the Guardia Civil to counter external and internal dangers, and keep watch over potential and identified enemies. Enemies would be jailed or exiled if necessary, and denied jobs in the government certainly. Arévalo wanted democracy, but he felt that for the present, reality demanded a ruler to use occasionally undemocratic means. He actively cultivated friendly elements of the armed forces, and promoted power to labor unions and reform-minded political parties. He took a

strong stand before the U.S. embassy and U.S.-owned companies, and promoted the fall of dictators via the Caribbean Legion. His own governmental appointees, including cabinet members, would be replaced quickly, like "a bolt of lightening from above,"<sup>7</sup> whenever he saw the need. Arévalo was more aggressive than his overt image as a humanist would indicate. He was not a military dictator, nor a "bleeding heart" liberal. Rather, he strove to be a strong but loving teacher. He endeavored to bring democracy to his country but he would carry a stick for the opposition.

The Arevalista reform movement had great potential to succeed, but serious obstacles stood in the way. One obstacle was created by the resistance maintained by the opposition, which yearned for a return to a conservative, authoritarian government. Social scientists have noticed numerous examples of authoritarianism in Latin American politics and society. Scholars who have treated the subject include Claudio Véliz, who in a 1980 monograph claimed that Latin America remains predominantly under the influence of a "centralist tradition," first developed in the colonial age. Periodical bouts with liberalism in the 19th and 20th centuries have been aberrations, according to Veliz, and, "for the past half century--with the expected variations from country to

country--Latin America has been finding its way back to its centralist mainstream."<sup>8</sup>

An authoritarian tradition (or conservative, or centralist), certainly exists, and has long existed, in Guatemala. But by the twentieth century, a liberal (or reformist) and democratic tradition also existed. From a small number of persons profoundly influenced by the Enlightenment, the liberal tradition developed and expanded during the nineteenth century, until this new tradition began to equal in depth and force the older, "centralist" tradition. Democracy, or some form of it, had been a professed ideal in Guatemala from the nineteenth century, and by 1944 a sincere and profound desire for a just and democratic government was felt by the great majority of the middle class sector. Also by 1944, socialism and Marxism had made a profound impact on liberal thought, thus encouraging reformist tendencies.

Both traditions, the old and the new, can be clearly and separately identified, as two distinct waves, and Guatemalan history can in part be examined through the clash of these two, separate, antagonistic intellectual, social and political currents. It would be more accurate, however, to think of Guatemalan history in terms of a "dual tradition," whose elements often overlapped and mixed together, especially in the

multifarious goals and beliefs of the individual. Staunch conservatives like Marroquín Rojas and Adrián Recinos exhibited many aspects of a humanitarian and reformist nature. Conversely, zealous reformers like Juan José Arévalo could embrace authoritarian means to achieve their goals. This clash of the dual tradition, expressed most clearly in the conflict between the reformers and the conservatives, would remain unresolved during the Arévalo period.

Disunity within the reform movement created another obstacle, but it would be an error to consider the divisive, contentious nature of Arevalista politics dominant over unity. Reformers had accomplished much, and they continued sharing similar goals and ideals. They did not want the Arévalo government to fail. The Arevalistas never criticized Arévalo in public, and respect for him remained high.<sup>9</sup> For many, especially the young, the Arévalo period remained an exhilarating time of pride and hope. They knew that the divisions and disagreements among them hurt their chances for continued success, but they remained confident that the goals of the revolution would be reached. Even with the divisions that developed during the 1949-1950 presidential campaign, an underground level of unity remained. Many of the reformers who had worked against the Arbenz

candidacy joined his government after the election: Manuel Galich serves as an outstanding example.

Divisiveness within the Arevalista parties, however, was serious. As Arévalo would later say, disunity caused "lamentable delays"<sup>10</sup> Divisiveness, it may be noted, also afflicted Arévalo's opposition; and the refusal of the various sectors to play by democratic rules--or to compromise or coexist--remained a pernicious legacy of Guatemalan history and remains so today. Asked in 1985 how Guatemala could achieve democracy, Juan José Arévalo, then 81 years old, exhorted fellow Guatemalans to "dominate sectarian passions," meaning that when politicians lose the elections they must support the winners, which "is a question of civil education and political ethics."<sup>11</sup>

United States interference with the reform movement caused the third obstacle. Left alone, or better yet helped, the Arevalista reformers may well have eventually overcome their problems of internal divisiveness and the conflict found in the dual tradition. Instead, the United States worked against the Arevalista movement, and gave aid, hope, and confidence to U.S. companies and the national opposition. By bolstering the opposition, the United States made compromise and cooperation appear unnecessary.<sup>12</sup> U.S.

policy also resulted in great frustration for the Arevalista reformers, and exacerbated the internal divisions.

The United States initially found justification for its Guatemalan policy in the alleged unfair treatment given the U.S. companies by the reformers. But by the end of 1949, communism had become the primary rationale behind policy. The rapid growth of apparent communist strength under Arévalo was completely unacceptable to U.S. officials. For the last few years during Arévalo's presidency, it was still hoped that the moderates would soon gain control of the situation, but U.S. policy planners were already considering the possible need for military intervention.

The concerns of U.S. officials, however, were exaggerated and U.S. policy only made the situation worse.<sup>13</sup> Marxism had influenced the beliefs of many educated Guatemalans, but by no means dominated the reform movement. Reformers generally accepted as truths the concepts of U.S. imperialism, class conflict, the "historic struggle" between patron and peasant, and between capitalism and labor: but they did not desire a communist state. Rule of the proletariat was contemplated only by a very few. Reform laws passed by the Arévalo government were modeled on concepts and goals

considered proper in Western democracies, and demonstrated very little, if any, communist influence. Even the land reform of 1952 was moderate. Possibly the most "radical" response of the government was its acceptance of the very existence of communism in the political process. The communists, however, did have significant power in the unions, and through the power of the workers' vote they helped keep the reform movement on the leftist path.

Scholars have interpreted U.S. policy rationale in various ways. José Ayabar de Soto believes that the U.S.A. acted primarily in defense of the U.S. companies; he rejects ideology as a factor.<sup>14</sup> Walter LaFeber claims that the U.S.A. used carefully thought-out measures, based on economic, political, and military power, to dominate and control Central America in a policy designed to further U.S. interests, with little regard for the best interests of Central America.<sup>15</sup> Richard Immerman believes that the U.S.A. sincerely feared the Guatemalan communists, but concludes that U.S. policy makers lacked knowledge of Guatemala, and did not understand the Guatemalan situation.<sup>16</sup> This author believes that all three above interpretations contain much truth.

Embassy and State Department officials could hardly have missed the sincerity in the Guatemalan desire

for reform and democracy, and the significant advances achieved. But U.S. officials after 1947 seldom demonstrated any concern or empathy for the reform movement. By 1949, strongly encouraged by U.S. companies and the native Guatemalan opposition, the United States identified the Arevalista movement as dangerously close to Communism. Immerman noted that U.S. officials repeatedly "used McCarthy-like inferences rather than facts to find evidence of Guatemalan communism."<sup>17</sup> Although the Cold War did create genuine world-wide security concerns, it must be noted that these concerns dovetailed very nicely with a traditional U.S. defense of business in Guatemala.

In sum, formidable obstacles afflicted the reform movement, and resulted in the failure to establish a solid, long lasting democracy in Guatemala. By the end of 1949, the writing was on the wall. Turmoil and violence had not been eliminated, they had become more ominous and deep-seated. Opposition to Arévalo had not been pacified or co-opted, it had grown in size and organization. The communist issue became much more profound, as a number of outstanding leaders in the Arevalista parties became increasingly outspoken and public with their Marxist beliefs. Urban and rural workers had reached a high degree of organization,

political power, and militancy, which increased the fear and resolve felt by the opposition. With the death of Arana and the subsequent loss of power by the FPL, the Arevalista camp became narrowed. The Arana-Arbenz conflict had not ended with Arana's death. Arana supporters and sympathizers remained in the military, and in the civilian community. They would weaken the governments of both Arévalo and Arbenz. Historic conflicts in Guatemalan society, such as the Indian-ladino conflict, had not been eliminated: they had increased. The United States government and business interests had become all the more recalcitrant and adamantly rejected compromise with the Arevalistas. Cold War fears matured in 1949, "the year of shocks," with Russia exploding the Bomb, and the "loss of China."

As a postscript to the Arévalo period, it may be noted that the government of Arbenz, 1951-1954, continued the reforms begun under Arévalo. A stress on education and social amelioration of the masses remained, and the Arbenz government promoted many programs which were designed to help the people. Notably, the government enacted a comprehensive land reform law which promised to supply land eventually to all landless Guatemalans. The government also made extensive use of the organizations set up under Arévalo to foster economic modernization.

The military continued to be a major center of power in Guatemala. In 1954, the president of the Congress, seven other congressmen, all twenty-two local department governors and the head of the land reform program were Army officers.<sup>18</sup> A State Department intelligence report noted that Arbenz, as President and head of the military, had "the power to check or break the communist organization at will." According to the report, the communists lacked the economic resources and popular following to oppose Arbenz.<sup>19</sup>

Arbenz, and his more business oriented supporters, concentrated on capitalistic enterprises designed to modernize Guatemala and make themselves prosperous. Cotton production continued to be popular with this group, and government policy was geared toward helping cotton growers. Indeed, the laws may have helped the cotton growers at the expense of the Guatemalan public.<sup>20</sup> Arbenz supporters were also given primary access to government loans.<sup>21</sup>

But Arbenz encountered the same obstacles that beset Arévalo. Internal division, which had never actually subsided, grew especially rife over the controversial land reform law.<sup>22</sup> Labor leaders found much to criticize in the entrepreneur elements of the Arbenz coalition who did not consider the advancement of

the masses their first priority.<sup>23</sup> Some Arbenz followers, although they supported land reform, were upset over the degree of communism and radicalism in the labor movement. In July of 1951, for example, four non-communist parties that supported Arbenz issued a joint statement claiming that they did not approve of communism.<sup>24</sup> Arbenz's desire and ability to control the communists increasingly became in doubt.

The Guatemalan opposition continued to fight and plot against the government. The United Fruit Company expanded and intensified its campaign in the United States against Guatemala. In the end, the U.S. government and the Guatemalan opposition to Arbenz collaborated in an effort to destroy his regime.

The impaired democracy developed under Arévalo could not be repaired by Arbenz: in fact the political situation only became worse. On June 18, 1954, Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, who had failed in a 1950 coup attempt against Arévalo, led an invading force of about 200 exiles into Guatemala from Honduras. By way of the presence of a number of top "Aranistas," the ghost of Francisco Arana would accompany the invasion force. Several airplanes that had been provided to the invaders by the United States bombed and strafed the capital and other towns. The United States also blocked entry into

Guatemala of all arms shipments. The Guatemalan Army and Air Force refused to fight, and the Arbenz government fell.<sup>25</sup>

#### Notes

1. See, for example, Handy, "Revolution and Reaction," 2, 137; García Añoveros, "caso Guatemala," 187.

2. See, for example, Díaz Rozzotto, El carácter, 39-40, 67-69, 303-307, and *passim*; García Añoveros, "caso Guatemala," 187; Galich, "Diez años," 39-40; María Luisa Mulet de Cerezo, Bibliografía analítica de la revolución del 20 de octubre de 1944 (Guatemala, 1980), 25; Solórzano, "Factores económicos," 47; North American Congress on Latin America, Guatemala, 47.

3. Nájera Farfán, Los estafadores, 77. For examples of recent authors who accept this criticism of Arévalo, see, Ayabar de Soto, Dependency and Intervention, 115; Handy, Gift of the Devil, 107; LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, 112-113; Schlesinger, Bitter Fruit, 42.

4. Dion, "Ideas of Juan José Arévalo," 73.

5. Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela, interview with the author, Guatemala City, July 15, 1987.

6. Marco Antonio Villamar Contreras, interview with the author, Guatemala City, July 17, 1987.

7. Oscar Barrios Castillo, interview with the author, Guatemala City, July 9, 1987.

8. Claudio Véliz, The Centralist Tradition in Latin America (Princeton, 1980), 9.

9. Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 8, 1987; Oscar Benítez Bone, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 1, 1987;

Jorge Arriola, interview with author, Guatemala City, June 27, 1986; Raúl Osequeda, interview with author, Guatemala City, June 29, 1986; Marco Antonio Villamar Contreras, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 17, 1987; Oscar Barrios Castillo, interview with author, Guatemala City, July 9, 1987.

10. Juan José Arévalo, letter to the author, September 4, 1986.

11. "Remanso de la democracia," Prensa Libre, Dec. 5, 1985, p.6.

12. Frankel, "Political Development," 267; Silvert, A Study in Government, 55.

13. Immerman, The CIA, 93-94; Frankel, "Political Development," 267-268.

14. Ayabar de Soto, Dependency and Intervention, 294.

15. LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions, 16-18.

16. Immerman, The CIA, ix, 9-19; for a similarly stated point of view, see Frankel, "Political Development," 273-4.

17. Immerman, The CIA, 93.

18. Schneider, Communism, 43.

19. "Guatemalan Support of Subversion and Communist Objectives 1950-1953," April 30, 1953, NAUS OIR 6185, 2.

20. Adams, Crucifixion, 385; Marcos Mishaan, "La producción nacional de algodón y la industria textil algodonera" (Licenciado thesis, Universidad de San Carlos, 1961), 149.

21. LCMD/GD, Government Patronage-Box 3.

22. "Agrarian Reform in Guatemala," March 5, 1953, NAUS OIR 6001, 6-7; Handy, "Precious Fruit," 29, 41, 47; see also the Guatemalan newspapers 1952-1954.

23. "Telegramas de CGTG," LCMD/GD, Presidency-Box 3.

24. "Integrada la alianza de los partidos democraticos," Integridad (July 1951), 7.

25. The standard sources on the 1954 invasion have become Schlesinger, Bitter Fruit, and Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala.

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Extensive use was also made of the documents kept in the Archivo General de Centroamérica in Guatemala City. The papers of the Ministerio de Gobernación and of the Presidente de la República provided valuable insights into the presidency and administration of Juan José Arévalo, but unfortunately only the documents for 1944 to

1948 were available. The remaining documents are still stored in the National Palace, and could not be obtained by this author. The Archivo also contains many newspapers and magazines from the Arévalo period.

Microfilms and prints of the documents collected in 1954 by the Comité Nacional de Defensa contra el Comunismo, contained in the U.S. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, gave further aid to this study. These are the documents used by Ronald Schneider to produce Communism in Guatemala 1944 to 1954, and they were donated to the Library by the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania. The collection contains about 50,000 items, which cover the years 1944 to 1954, but most material pertains to the Arbenz period.

The archives of El Imparcial supplied a great amount of information. Besides the collection of El Imparcial newspapers, various books, photos, and reference materials, the archives contain many thousands of newspaper and magazine clippings, filed by subject or person's name. The archives were begun under the Arbenz period and continued until the present day and now contain a wealth of bibliographic and political material. Other sources include the Biblioteca Nacional, which contains a large collection of Guatemalan newspapers, and

the Biblioteca César Brañas, which contains rare books, pamphlets, periodicals, and several collections of personal letters.

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Dr. Jorge Arriola (Hero) of the 1944 revolution, Minister of Education under the Junta)

Dr. Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela (PAR and FPL Secretary General, Congressman)

Lic. Oscar Barrios Castillo (FPL, President of Congress)

Lic. Oscar Benítez Bone (RN, Congressman)

Don Rufino Guerra Cortave (El Imparcial newspaperman)

Dr. Raúl Osequeda (Minister of Education, Minister of Foreign Relations, close friend of Arévalo)

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Carlos Manuel Pellecer (communist leader)

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#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alan LeBaron received a B.A. in history from Boise State University, December 1974; an M.A. in history from the University of Maryland, May 1978; and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Florida, December 1988. Mr. LeBaron has seven years experience teaching English in Korea and Japan, and has taught history for the University of Maryland in Korea and Japan during 1978-1979 and 1985. Mr. LeBaron has lived, worked, and traveled 12 years out of the United States, in Europe, Asia, and Central America, and has a special interest in international political and cultural relations.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



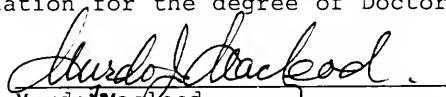
David Bushnell, Chairman  
Professor of History

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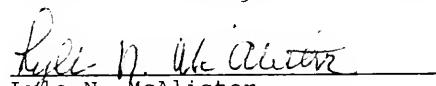


Paul L. Doughty  
Professor of Anthropology

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Murdo MacLeod  
Graduate Research Professor of History

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Lyle N. McAlister  
Distinguished Service  
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
Charles F. Sidman  
Professor of History

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dean, Graduate School

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



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